

**CALLED  
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# **CALLED to be RELEVANT**

**By**

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**THE NATIONAL METHODIST STUDENT MOVEMENT**

**1964**

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# By Way of Introduction

THE SUBJECT of this book is the relevance of the church in our revolutionary era. Much has been said and written on this topic already, so much in fact that at first thought it might seem that no good purpose could be served by yet another book in this general area of concern. However, it has seemed to me the problem is so complex and far-reaching that even though much significant effort has been expended upon it, much remains to be seen and said. I have undertaken to see and to say some of what yet remains.

For one thing, I believe the "revolution" about which we have talked for the past few years is far more fundamental and profound than is generally recognized. It is not a superficial readjustment. Events of the twentieth century have cast us into a new world for which many old presuppositions and old forms of thought and action are forever inadequate. We will never go back to the more comfortable and cozy little world of the nineteenth century. The future toward which we move is disturbing and pregnant with possibilities for good and evil. We greatly need to develop a mental and emotional flexibility that will permit us to adapt readily to demands with which that future will confront us.

It has seemed to me, also, that much of the time the discussion of the relevance of the church has been impoverished by an almost total absence of a philosophy of history. The result may be a demonstration of the irrelevance about which there is well-founded concern. The church does not exist except in the world, and both

its history and its contemporary mission are bound up with the world. As the church attempts to understand its mission it must see itself within the process of history and must understand that the church is only one of the channels through which God works in history. Implicit in the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition is a lively sense of God's action in history. The church needs to regain this sense of history and to develop some workable understanding of its own place in God's present action in human affairs. This need, in my judgment, lies at the root of the church's present quest for relevance.

There are other root problems. Thus it is essential further that the church learn anew what it means to be "in the world but not of the world." Sometimes the church has been neither; sometimes it has been both. Either of these lead inevitably to a distortion of the nature of the church and to the frustration of its mission. The tendency in mid-twentieth century America is to be both in the world and of it. I fear that much current counsel may lead to the church being neither in the world nor of it. This would only compound the irrelevance.

It is necessary, I believe, that the church understand and appreciate both its own nature and strengths and those of the present culture. In philosophical terms, this is a problem in values, especially the nature of intrinsic values and of the instrumental values related to them. To appreciate the values, both actual and potential of our time, to be devoted to them, while at the same time to retain the capacity to be critical in the name of the eternal purposes of God, is a problem with which we must deal much more effectively.

One fact that I find extremely disturbing is that a large number of serious-minded young adults are turning away from the church *regretfully*. Many of these are people who believe in the ideals which the church proclaims and want very much for the church to be relevant. They turn away convinced that the church for the most part is not relevant to the major contemporary problems of personal

and social life. This "turning away" does not always mean severing connection with the church. Many continue a formal relationship, but they have ceased to expect creative and perceptive insight on real problems or prophetic leadership amidst the pressing issues of the day.

Equally disturbing is the fact that very often those concerned with bringing about genuine involvement of the members fail to appreciate how serious this spiritual estrangement really is. The supposition often appears to be that what is involved is to do more cleverly or more effectively what is already under way, or to find new "gimmicks" to bring people together, or to establish a more convenient meeting time, or to provide more baby-sitting service for members with children. Too seldom does the church realize that there must be radical rethinking all along the line, beginning with what the church is undertaking to do and why, and then of the manner in which the task is undertaking.

This book is more concerned with focusing on essential issues in the problem of relevance than it is with providing "answers." To expect to accomplish the latter would be hopelessly presumptive. Nevertheless, we are beyond the point where more analysis devoid of any suggestions for constructive action would serve any useful purpose. I have tried, therefore to be honest and realistic about the problems and to avoid if at all possible oversimplifications. On the other hand, I have tried to face with equal honesty the question of what is to be done. This seems to me the only responsible course if we are not to abandon the church entirely as a hopeless anachronism. Thus the concluding chapters attempt to suggest the nature of the Christian witness in the current scene and to explore ways in which that witness is to be communicated in certain strategic areas and conditions of contemporary life.

It should be noted that this book is consciously and deliberately directed to students, faculty, and administrators of colleges and universities more than to anyone else.

Since the time I entered college as a freshman until the present moment I have not been far from the campus—as undergraduate, graduate student, professor, and service agent to higher educational commitments of the church. The campus is where I feel at home, and if I have anything to say it is likely to be most significantly directed to those involved in higher education.

There is another reason, however, why I have written primarily for this group. It is because I believe that in the years ahead the basic nature of our culture, the values in which we believe, the patterns of our lives, and our ultimate commitments in faith are going to be affected more profoundly by persons trained in colleges and universities than by any other human beings. And it is within the academic community that I have known so many who have come with regret to the conclusion that the church has fallen into hopeless irrelevance. I am deeply concerned about what these persons have to contribute in an effort to regain relevance. I am concerned also about what the heart of the Christian faith has to contribute to their lives and to their leadership of the future years.

This book came into being through my association with three groups of students with whom I confronted many of the issues discussed in the following pages. In the summer of 1960 I served as study director for forty or more students who assembled in Strasbourg in connection with the teaching conference of the World Student Christian Federation. Following the study period I traveled with a small group first to Moscow and then to Finland for a work camp. In the summers of 1962 and 1964 I served as study director for an intensive seminar program in which Marxism-Leninism was investigated in travel to the U.S.S.R., Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Rumania. In each of these experiences the concern and serious questioning of my student associates stimulated me to identify basic issues the Christian community is facing and to think through to some significant conclusions. Their interest and their subsequent urging have

been largely responsible for this effort to put these thoughts into writing with some hope that I have said something.

Since this book ranges over many concerns and issues it is intended to stimulate thought and the desire for extensive investigation into many of these issues. I have therefore listed at the end of each of the subsequent chapters a number of books which could be profitably pursued with this purpose in mind. I have listed some materials which agree in essence with positions I have taken, some which oppose my positions, and some which lead more deeply into these and associated issues. Numerous writings listed in footnotes are appropriate also for further study, and for the most part are not repeated at chapter ends.

## World Revolution As a Fact

THE ONE constant fact about the life we know is change. All things change, save only the law of change itself. Sometimes the change is gradual, sometimes almost imperceptible. There have been periods in human history when for centuries life seemed to crawl along much in the same pattern with each generation simply reflecting the values and convictions and re-enacting the lives of their fathers and of their fathers' fathers. But these times, too, pass. Both tranquility and stagnation are temporary.

At other times changes in human history have been more regular and patterned. Change seemed describable by such terms as development or evolution. Causes and effects could be discerned in the play of forces upon one another and in the impact of unusual personalities.

There have also periodically been times when change has been cataclysmic. Not only the habits of life, but more significantly the very convictions about the meaning of life, the mythos by which men live, the understanding of human nature, the convictions regarding values, the expectation regarding destiny and ultimate meaning have been in such chaotic change that all fixed points seem to have been obliterated. In such times the very guideposts of life seem to be down and men find themselves confused and afraid. What was true yesterday seems not to be true today; what was good last year may seem evil now; what was valuable and worth living for day before yester-

day somehow may have lost the capacity to inspire devotion today. Such times when life is shaken to the very foundations, when all human structures by which life is understood have been swept away or are threatened, when it is clear that new patterns and new organizational theories must emerge if life is to go on at all, must be regarded as times of *revolution*. Ours is such a time. Indeed, it may be that this is the most profound revolution in the whole of human history, since it reaches into every area of life and is a fact with which we must deal at every level.

Who can estimate properly when the present revolution began? Was it precipitated by the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century? Or was it actually inaugurated through the impact of the American and French Revolutions in the late eighteenth century? Was it really ushered in by the signing of the Magna Charta? Did it have its real beginning in the Protestant Reformation with its emphasis upon faith instead of works, upon the dignity and responsibility of every man standing as an individual responsible before God? Or is what we are now experiencing the accumulating effect upon human history of that time long ago when God acted uniquely in Jesus Christ to reveal his own nature more clearly and to demonstrate dramatically his will for men? Caught as we are in the midst of this revolution and struggling often with little or no success to find some sense of direction or some emerging significance, we lack the perspective to answer questions of this sort. Only in some future century when men of discernment can look with the advantage of hindsight upon the events of which we are a part can the real genesis and scope of our revolution be estimated. Yet, though we cannot give an adequate account of its beginning nor predict with any dependability the ramifications through which it yet will pass, certainly we can see on every hand unmistakable evidences of its present nature and expression.



## **Social, Political, and Ethnic Revolution**

Perhaps the most dramatically apparent evidences of revolution are the social, political and ethnic changes which have been in progress for the past fifty years.

In China there have been two major revolutions within the twentieth century. In 1912 and 1913, Dr. Sun Yat-sen succeeded in leading China out of medieval lethargy into awareness of national destiny. He proclaimed a new China whose guiding principles were to be Nationalism, Democracy, and Livelihood. Soon China found herself at war with an imperialistic Japan and the new democratic government of China was put to a severe test. Following the first world war Chiang Kai-shek emerged as the new strong man in China, ostensibly dedicated to the principles of Sun Yat-sen, yet conducting a government whose actual dedication to such principles has never been entirely clear. As a part of the Communist revolution sweeping a large part of the world the government of Chiang found itself under serious attack from within by Chinese revolutionary forces under the leadership of Mao Se-tung. Soon after World War II the government of Chiang fell and he with several thousand troops were driven off the mainland into Formosa. The new Red regime in China immediately set about effecting a political and economic revolution much more far-reaching than anything that had occurred under Sun or Chiang and patterned after Russian Communism.

In 1917 two revolutions occurred in Russia after centuries in which masses of Russian peasants had been under the iron domination of a decadent aristocracy. The moderate government established under the leadership of Alexander Kerensky was overthrown by Bolsheviks who cried for "peace! land! bread!" and promised freedom for all minorities and for all nationalities within the Russian sphere of influence. Nicolai Lenin, with the aid of the German government which was yet at war with

Russia, successfully led a second revolution and established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics dedicated to a frank materialism and utilizing every conceivable means to achieve the declared ultimate goal of a classless society.

Throwing off centuries of darkness, superstition, and ignorance, India too aroused to life in the twentieth century. After years of agitation against British colonial rule, dramatized in the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, India at last won status as an independent republic within the Commonwealth, in 1950. From this strife there emerged also as a large slice out of India a new country by the name of Pakistan.

In the countries of Europe the revolution has been nonetheless profound. For years France was tottering and shaken by instability and hopelessly divided political rule. Spain underwent bloody revolution prior to World War II. In England the revolution was economic in nature with a shift of economic power from the landed nobility to the common man. The tragic events in Germany under Hitler as the Weimar republic was rejected and dictatorship was reestablished are much too well known to require description here. So too were similar events in Italy under Mussolini. As a result of a second world war Europe was again sliced up, with part of Germany brought under Soviet domination, part under the Atlantic allies, led by the United States. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Finland all find their lives dominated directly or indirectly by their proximity to the Soviet Union.

In the United States the revolution has been economic and ethnic. *Laissez faire* capitalism struggled and died in the Great Depression and in its place emerged an entirely new philosophy of political-economic life, introduced under the influence of the New Deal. More dramatic, if not more profound, has been the race struggle in America in the twentieth century. After years of acceptance of second-class citizenship and hope in the eventual justice

of the philosophy of "separate but equal," the American Negro found himself in position to offer serious opposition to this pattern of things. With educated leadership, growing economic resources, and new awareness of its political potential, the Negro race began in the 1940's and 1950's to break down patterns of segregation and discrimination. Financed and supported by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and led by the brilliant Thurgood Marshall, the Negroes won a historic decision in the United States Supreme Court in 1954. The court declared segregated schools unconstitutional, and by implication, struck a resounding blow at the entire doctrine of "separate but equal."

There has ensued a new period of bitterness and breakdown of communication between the races, but this revolution is on. As this book is written the revolution is becoming even more widespread and powerful. It will not be stopped. There will be bitterness, violence, bloodshed, heartbreak, but the revolution in racial patterns in America will not be stopped. It will go on until the Negro and other minority groups win their rights to be first-class citizens and to enjoy the opportunities for education and economic advantages which theoretically are open to every citizen in a democracy.

Accompanying the social, political, economic, and ethnic revolutionary changes throughout the world has been the breakdown of the colonial system. As long ago as 1940 Wendell Willkie wrote:

When I say in order to have peace this world must be free, I am only reporting that a great process has started which no man—certainly not Hitler—can stop. Men and women all over the world are on the march, physically, intellectually, and spiritually. After centuries of ignorant and dull compliance, hundreds of millions of people in eastern Europe and Asia have opened the books. Old fears no longer frighten them. They are no longer willing to be Eastern slaves for Western profits. They are beginning to know that men's welfare through-

out the world is interdependent. They are resolved, as we must be, that there is no more place for imperialism within their own society than in the society of nations. The big house on the hill surrounded by mud huts has lost its awesome charm.<sup>1</sup>

No prophecy could have been more accurate. People everywhere are refusing to continue as wards or servants of the European colonial powers. This is perhaps most dramatically demonstrated in the strife which in the 1960's shakes Africa from the North to the South and in which the last vestiges of European domination must be swept away. This in itself will not bring peace because the vast intellectual, social, and economic potentialities of Africa have never been guided and disciplined to self-realization. Heretofore preoccupation regarding Africa has always been in terms of what it could do for European or American peoples. European powers maneuver as best they can to hold for a little time to the advantages they have known through colonial possessions in Africa. Soviet dominated interests play upon the unrest and the desire for equality and freedom, to foment strife and violence, and no one can tell when this struggle might erupt into conflict that would spread far beyond the shores of the African continent itself.

Frighteningly close at hand, Cuba now has moved into the Communist orbit. This would not have needed to be so. For a half century and more the United States had a completely open opportunity to build in Cuba a free and responsible nation. Stable democratic government, cultural and educational development, and economic independence could have been achieved under American leadership and would have made of Cuba a staunch ally and financial associate.

Instead, American interest in Cuba was totally unenlightened and often seriously irresponsible. For instance,

1. Wendell Willkie, *One World*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1943.

we were never really under illusion about the tyranny of Batista rule. But because Batista did not interfere with American commercial ventures in Cuba we were content. We easily excuse ourselves from responsibility for Batista and the perpetuation of ignorance and poverty of the island on the ground of non-interference. But the fact is that from the time of the Spanish-American War onward Cuba has been so linked to and determined by American economic policies that in fact she was an American satellite. Cuban independence of American influence was a fiction. We cannot understand the Cuban revolution and the rise of Fidel Castro except as a revolt against American economic imperialism as much as against the Batista government.

At this writing it is not possible to foresee what pain and tragedy may lie ahead as Communism extends its influence and solidifies its hold on Cuba. Whatever this may be, the United States must now be honest enough to recognize that in failing to help Cuba to rise to the level of responsible independence we had a major share in the making of that tragedy.

Patterns of ecclesiastical, economic, and political paternalism are coming increasingly into trouble throughout much of Latin America. There is real and present danger that Marxist leadership will provide the imagination, courage and resources for pending revolution in Latin America. Cuba may be only the first Communist foothold in the Americas.

Added to the general revolution which has been described must be the revival of the old struggle between the Arabs and the Jews in the Mideast with all the bitterness and recrimination that always characterized this struggle.

The social, political, economic, and ethnic revolution is so universal and so profound in its implications that the twentieth century almost certainly will not see the fulfilment of whatever new world patterns must eventuate.

## II

### Scientific Revolution

Scientific study and research is also involved in revolution. Nineteenth century models of the universe based on Copernican astronomy and Newtonian physics have become museum pieces. Changes in basic scientific theory are well suggested by an article written by Donald Hatch Andrews, entitled, "The Challenge of the New Cosmology," and appearing in the September, 1958, issue of THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR. Professor Andrews says physical matter as currently understood is more like music than like the standard models of varicolored balls connected by wires (still generally in use in chemistry classrooms). What he is suggesting is that matter is best described as a harmonious relationship between fields of force, with dominant and subdominant "themes," with complex overtones and undertones, with the emergence, regression, and reemergence of certain persistent "themes." In all of this the conception of an atom as an ultimate, irreducible, physical granule has completely disappeared. The atom is now understood as a name for a certain organizational pattern of energy, within which there is an as yet undetermined number of subpatterns.

Scientific conceptions of the history of our universe also have undergone radical revision. In the article cited above, Professor Andrews speaks of an expanding universe beginning 5,000,000,000 years ago and rushing outward in four dimensions—length, breadth, height, and dimension X, with the speed of light (186,000 miles per second). Such conceptions as these lead easily into the possibility that our entire "universe" is only one in a whole galaxy of "universes," each expanding at inconceivable speeds according to its own unique dimensions.

Even our understanding of space has undergone extensive revision. Professor Einstein introduced, and others have further developed, the concept of curved space. In

measuring solar distances it is now necessary to think in terms of a curved spacetime continuum.

Similar, even if sometimes not quite so spectacular, revolutionary changes are in process in practically all other sciences as well. In the field of biochemistry, for instance, already inorganic matter is being transformed into organic material through complicated laboratory procedures. Uses of knowledge of atomic radiation and other information gained from nuclear studies have revolutionized means of measuring time in the sciences of geology and anthropology.

New scientific information applied in the fields of electronics and technology are producing spectacular new results in materials, products, and machinery that were unknown even in principle a dozen years ago. Indeed, the revolution in the scientific realm is a total revolution as elsewhere. The effects upon human life cannot be traced and could hardly be overestimated. Ralph Burhoe, director of the Academy of Arts and Sciences has written:

By uncorking the magic bottle of science, man has let loose a jinni which probably has more radically altered the conditions of human existence in the past century than anything that has happened in the past five thousand years; and it appears to be expanding its power to alter our situation at a rate which overwhelms our imagination to contemplate. I am referring now not so much to the releasing in the past century of a large part of the world's store of fossil solar energy that it took millions of years to build up, nor to the potential threats of the unleashing on earth of a vast, atomic nuclear type of energy like that which fires the sun itself, catastrophic though these may be; but rather I refer to the fundamental alteration of the pattern of the forces or conditions of life under which man for millennia has existed. To prosper under the former set of conditions, man's own internal design and controls have adjusted him, in response to the processes of natural selection since the beginning of life on earth. The threat to man is analogous to the threat to a species of fish occasioned by the drying up of the waters it had been inhabiting. Unfortunately for the fish, it did not have time to adapt

itself to the ways of life necessary for survival on dry land, and there was no way it could get back to the watery circumstances for which it was adapted. It is very likely that man is not presently organized to survive in the drastically different environment he has unwittingly provided by his own technological powers.<sup>2</sup>

### III

#### **Cultural Revolution**

There is total revolution in process also in the fields of cultural and intellectual endeavor. Perhaps this can be best illustrated by noting the impact of existentialism upon theology.

Paradoxically, though existentialism is one of the most widely used terms in current intellectual discourse it is one of the most slippery and difficult to define. The fundamental meaning of existentialism is that the truth about any question is to be found in the event itself, the experience of facing the problems created, and in finding answers. That is to say, life is pulsating in process, changing, unpredictable. Any set of carefully stated philosophical "principles" according to which life is to be understood is unreal. Life, it is claimed, is not like that. It cannot be described ahead of time. It cannot be categorized. It cannot be predicted. To attempt to understand the present or predict the future through categories arrived at by observation of the past is to become enmeshed completely in unreality. Instead, it is maintained that adequate grasp of and response to life must arise within the "existing" body of facts. Persons will be confronted with necessities of choices and these choices must be decided on the basis of what the persons are within the unpredictable circumstances. There is no other answer than the answer which emerges as persons are

2. Ralph W. Burhoe, "Salvation in the Twentieth Century," in *SCIENCE PONDS RELIGION*, Harlow Shapley, ed. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1960.



true to themselves in the midst of such pulsating real-life events.

Perhaps a good illustration of this can be found in Jean Paul Sartre's play, NO EXIT. In this play three people find themselves on the other side of death. For a long time they find it difficult to be sure whether they are in heaven or hell because the experience itself is nothing like any of the pictures which have been painted for them. They are each ushered courteously into a comfortable, meagerly furnished room equipped with tables, chairs, a divan, a rug, lamps, but no windows, no books, no television, no radio sets, no diversions whatsoever. It is not long until they realize that this is hell, because despite the absence of fires and racks, this is excruciating torture. It will be necessary for them to spend eternity with themselves, with no place to look out, with no diversion, with nothing to think about but themselves and their past lives. In this very existential hell, the characters are condemned to *really* knowing themselves and each other for the first time. "Hell," said one of them, "is other people." But is also knowing oneself. This being responsible, being face to face with one's real self, being unable to deduce by any set of prior principles what real values will be or what the experience of eternal existence might be like, is the nature of existentialism.

The existentialist impact on theological thought perhaps began with the work of Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish journalist and sometime philosopher. Kierkegaard leveled devastating attacks upon the organized church and the ordained clergy of his time, both because of their artificiality and because of what he regarded as their essential irrelevance to the real concerns of life. He was especially critical of Protestant theology because of what he regarded as its unholy alliance with philosophy. He decried the idea that Christianity is a body of ideas supportable by careful philosophical reasoning and capable of producing a world view. Rather, Christianity has to do with man's estrangement from God, with loneliness and

brokenness, and desperate responsibility under God's judgment. Any religion that fails to cause man to know his aloneness and to turn his back on all of his system-building and his grandiose attempts to be God through the power of his own reason is an unwholesome and unhealthy thing.

It was not until the twentieth century that existentialism became a dominant chord in European and American theology. The close of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century in Europe were times of great expectations. Industrial changes had come about, scientific achievements promised unlimited material comfort and prosperity for the future, artistic and literary centers were developing everywhere, education was on the increase and illiteracy on the retreat, medical science was improving health and extending life, and perhaps best of all, the great European powers had renounced war and had established machinery whereby all international disputes henceforth could be settled across conference tables. But the events of the first quarter of the twentieth century demonstrated with unmistakable clarity that man was essentially the same being he had always been and that the so-called scientific achievement, the culture, the education with which he had surrounded himself had only built a facade. Underneath, the same old brutalities were revealed in the bloodiest war the world had known up until that time. The very knowledge and scientific skills by which man had thought to build a flawless society were applied to the destruction of all that men held dear. Within a few brief years, the structures of civilized and cultured modern man were leveled to the ground. Both general chaos and personal and social brutality descended like a death-dealing fog upon the whole of Europe.

One major reaction to total disillusionment was the *Krisis* theology of Karl Barth. To him it was now clear that the ancient story of the Tower of Babel had been reenacted in modern Europe. Men had again sought through their own powers to construct the Kingdom of God, but

as had always been true, just at the moment when man's pride in his own achievements was at its greatest, God had spoken a ringing *Nein!* As ever before, God had leveled the works of men and confused human tongues and had revealed to man his complete sinfulness and his utter need of God. The essential business of the church is to call men to repentance and to knowledge of their sinful pride and idolatry. Man must give up all pretenses to being wise or good or powerful and recognize himself as utterly ill with sin and standing naked and helpless in need. Only then, as man in his anguish would cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner," would God come to man and heal him of his sin.

The existentialist element in this theological revolution is the denial of man's ability to prove God by any process of human reason or to find God in nature or in science or in any other process of thought or abstraction. God is to be found only in the direct experience of human need. The finding of God is an encounter, the initiative for which lies with God himself and in no sense with man. When God lays his hand upon man, confronts him in the Bible or in the preached Word, all argument for or against is irrelevant. The knowledge of God, therefore, lies in the direct experience of God and this experience comes only as man finds himself in desperate need of God.

Existentialists decry theological liberalism as an unsuccessful attempt to combine philosophy and theology with the result that it is neither good philosophy nor good theology. They oppose fundamentalism as hopelessly naive and guilty of glorifying ignorance. They oppose Roman Catholic and Thomistic thought as essentially irrelevant system-building that has nothing to do with the confrontation of the living God in the desperation of human need. The result is that theological thought will never again be the same as it was before the rise of the existentialist critique. Whether one reacts positively or negatively to the existentialist challenge, he must react

if he is to be alert and honest. Existentialism cannot be ignored. It has many ramifications, not only directly in theology but in interpretations of, for instance, the ethical implications of the Christian faith. A focus on theological discussion is emerging because of the radical and revolutionary criticism existentialist thought has leveled in this important area of man's intellectual life. Not only the focus of theological discussion but ultimately the faith of the Christian community may be altered radically.

#### **IV**

#### **Moral Revolution**

During the twentieth century there has been a revolution also in social and private morality. This has come about from perhaps at least three causes. One of these is the increasing complexity of contemporary life. A second is a growing understanding of how much relativity is to be found both in moral problems and in moral action. The third cause is the impact of existentialism both upon secular and theological thought. As would be expected, the existentialist claim is that only the living itself can give answers to moral problems. Situations vary greatly and circumstances require great flexibility of thought and response. Each person is so much an individual, so personally responsible, that advice regarding moral decision is largely useless.

Jean Paul Sartre, whom we mentioned earlier, represents the school of thought which denies that any answers are possible save the doing itself. Sartre cites an example of a student who came to him during the German occupation of Paris in World War II. The student's father had been killed while serving in the French underground. Now the student felt a strong obligation to take up where his father had left off. Yet his mother was completely dependent upon him, emotionally and financially. Additionally, he was a good student and some had advised him to stay with his studies and prepare himself for a

future career. His problem, of course, was how should he choose. Sartre sent him away with the observation that no one could advise him because there was no answer apart from the living itself. He would do what he must and this would be right. The only wrongs would be insincerity about his own nature and failure to accept responsibility for his own acts.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear to all thinking persons that, fundamentally, Sartre is at least partly right. None can help very much in real moral dilemmas with specific advice. Each of us must act in terms of what we are, totally and intrinsically.

There is a fourth reason for the loss of certainty and a growing conviction of chartless relativity in the field of morality. This is that for too long a time the wrong reasons were being given for doing the right things. Expediency, that is, primary attention to comfortable or fortunate or desirable consequences, was usually the criterion for determining the right. It is amazing how many otherwise informed and sophisticated persons have assumed that moral rightness could be depended upon to produce fortunate consequences, and conversely, that fortunate consequences certified the moral rightness of the acts from which they resulted. Confusion now arises because what now often appears to be expedient is not what at one time was widely assumed to be right. Thus, for instance, in the contemporary business world honesty may not always be the best policy in terms of profits or achievement or advancement. The 1961 convictions of "price-fixing" against officials of highly respected corporations (about which the general public experienced only minor shock, if any) illustrates this problem.

In the matter of sex morality circumstances also have changed. Now many college students who for various reasons find it is necessary or desirable to postpone mar-

3. Jean Paul Sartre, *EXISTENTIALISM*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1947.

riage, can buy effective contraceptives in every drugstore and it is no longer clear to them why the most intimate relationships of life should be reserved for marriage.

The demands of contemporary life often seem also to create conflict between responsible citizenship and professional success. Taking a courageous stand for causes is often now frowned upon by the large corporations which offer many of our most highly trained college graduates attractive professional opportunities. It makes no difference how right the cause may be; if it is unpopular or even unfamiliar it is frowned upon. Rather, the correct behavior is to affiliate oneself with the widely approved and harmless benevolent agencies of the community. To serve as chairman of the United Givers Fund, or on the church board of stewards is excellent. Thus one can demonstrate that he is a solid citizen and at the same time attracts only favorable attention to himself and to the corporation he represents.

The net results of uncertainty and confusion regarding the nature of values and the grounds of a responsible morality is a spreading inability to understand the real meaning and ramifications of one's actions. Paradoxically, there never has been a better informed generation than our own; seldom if ever been a more morally uncertain and morally irresponsible one.

Aldous Huxley illustrates our moral irresponsibility in a most telling manner in his provocative book, *APE AND ESSENCE*. This is a story of World War III, during which most of the populated portion of the earth has been devastated and rendered uninhabitable by nuclear bombs and atomic radiation. The story is cast in the period following the war. The narrative proceeds with a series of flashbacks which progressively illustrate the conditions which led to World War III.

In one of these flashbacks Huxley gives us a picture of a group of young biochemists whose assignment was to perfect certain forms of biological warfare against civilian populations. At the end of the day the young

doctors catch commuter trains to the various suburban areas where they live. We see one of them coming up the front walk to his home greeted by his two small children and their puppy. The family has a nourishing and delicious dinner together; there follows a storytime with the children. At last the younger members of the family are put to bed and after a time the neighbors come in for a couple of hours of bridge and refreshments. When the neighbors have gone the young doctor and his wife at last retire to the intimacies of the marital bed. Morning comes and the family is up, bathed, clothed, fed and on its way to the day's interests at school, marketing and the laboratory. The young doctor catches the 8:20 back to the city, returning to the laboratory where he is joined by his colleagues. They continue throughout another day employing their specialized skills in the perfection of biological warfare upon families like their own.

Deeper than the tragedy of the manner in which their technological skills are appropriated is the fact that the young doctors appeared to recognize no fundamental contradiction between their love of their families and the work to which they gave themselves day by day. Their predicament is a property of contemporary culture.

The net result of all this is moral chaos in which there is no longer clarity and understanding about what is right nor conviction regarding what should be done about what is right. This is not revolution moving toward a goal but it is revolution, chaotic, anarchic, and disorganized. As long ago as March, 1951, Senator J. William Fulbright spoke with sober concern of "The Moral Deterioration of American Democracy." Among the perceptive statements in that statesmanlike and disturbing address were the following:

Much of the evil of the world is beyond the reach of the law. The law cannot prevent gossip. It cannot prevent men from bearing false witness against their neighbors. It cannot

restrain men from avarice and gluttony. It cannot restrain a man from betraying his friends. In short, it cannot prevent much of the evil to which men are, unfortunately, too prone. The law being inadequate, men long ago supplemented the law courts with courts of equity, where the spirit of the law, rather than its letter, is paramount. Underlying the law are the codes of ethics promulgated by the great religions and recognized by all civilized men as being essential to a humane and enlightened existence. . . .

This question of the moral strength of our people is not just an internal domestic matter. It has grave implications in our international relations. Without confidence in their Government, the people will not make the sacrifices necessary to oppose Russia successfully. Professor Toynbee, in his well-known historical study, demonstrated clearly the vast majority of great civilizations have been destroyed, not as a result of external aggression, but as a consequence of domestic corruption. A democracy can recover quickly from physical or economic disaster, but when its moral convictions weaken it becomes easy prey from the demagogue and the charlatan. Tyranny and oppression then become the order of the day.<sup>4</sup>

## V

### The Church and Revolution

The manifestations of revolution cited in these pages are only suggestive. It is in a world shaken and troubled by total revolution that the life and mission of the contemporary church is cast. Perhaps in the deepest sense this is not a new condition for the Christian church. Its life was conceived in revolution and by its nature it must ever be a catalyst of revolution where easy satisfaction with less than the best possible has brought complacency. Yet while this condition is not new to the church in principle it may be that the church is now fighting the most desperate of all battles for its life because of the subtlety and the vast strength of the forces arrayed against it. This must, therefore, be a time of soul-searching and turmoil for every Christian who takes

4. CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, March 27, 1951.



seriously the contemporary mission of the church and who feel deep personal concern regarding his own participation in that mission. Because it is a time of uncertainty fraught with vast new dangers, and characterized by widespread uncertainties, it is a testing time both for the church and the individual Christian.

Now and then a creative spirit succeeds in focusing a clear new light upon some fundamental problems of an era. Christopher Fry's play, *A SLEEP OF PRISONERS*, undertakes to tell the story of Man and his search for Good, beset by the heritage of his own wrongdoing and by the confusions of a time such as ours.

*A SLEEP OF PRISONERS* is cast in a ruined church where four soldiers are held prisoners. Apparently by design the play is vague as to time and place and principals. The concern is for the universal problem which persists throughout particulars. The narrative is carried in the dreams of each man in succession, with each demonstrating his true nature and casting his strengths and weaknesses in spiritual perspective. The fourth dreamer sees himself and his companions re-enacting the biblical drama of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, through which the common problem is seen in broadest perspective.

Adams (calling to Meadows). Who are you?

Meadows. Man.

Adams. Under what command?

Meadows. God's.

Adams. May we come through?

Meadows. If you have the patience and the love.

David. Under this fire?

Meadows. Well, then, the honesty.

Adams. What honesty?

Meadows. Not to say we do

a thing for all men's sakes when we do it  
only for our own. And quick eyes to see

Where evil is. While any is our own  
We sound fine words unsoundly. . . .

Peter: Do you mean to stay here?

Meadows. I can't get out alone. Neither can you.  
But, on the other hand, single moments  
Gather towards the striking clock.  
Each man is the world. . . .

David. Who's to lead us out of this?

Meadows. It's hard to see. Who will trust  
What the years have endlessly said?

Adams. There's been a mort of time. You'd think  
Something might have come of it. These men  
Are ready to go, and so am I. . . .

Meadows. Behind us lie  
The thousand and the thousand and the thousand  
years vexed and terrible. And still we  
Use the cures which never cure.

David. For Mortal sake,  
Shall we move? Do we just wait and die?

Meadows. Figures of wisdom back in the old sorrows  
Hold and wait for ever. We see, admire  
But never suffer them: suffer instead  
A stubborn aberration.  
O God, the fabulous wings unused,  
Folded in the heart . . . .

Adams. Strange how we trust the powers that ruin  
And not the powers that bless.

David. But good's unguarded,  
As defenseless as a naked man.

Meadows. Imperishably. Good has no fear;  
Good is itself, what ever comes.  
It grows, and makes, and bravely  
Persuades, beyond all tilt of wrong;  
Stronger than anger, wiser than strategy,  
Enough to subdue cities and men  
If we believe it with a long courage of truth.

David. Corporal, the crowning son of heaven  
Thinks we can make a morning.

Meadows. Not

By old measures. Expedience and self-  
preservation can rot as they will. Lord,  
where we fail as men we fail as deeds of  
time. . . .

Meadows. The human heart can go to the lengths of God.

Dark and cold we may be, but this  
Is no winter now. The frozen misery  
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move,  
The thunder is the thunder of the floes,  
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.  
Thank God our time is now when wrong  
Comes up to face us everywhere,  
Never to leave us till we take  
The longest stride of soul men ever took.  
Affairs are now soul size.  
The enterprise  
Is exploration into God.  
Where are you going? It takes  
So many thousand years to wake,  
But will you wake for pity's sake. . . .<sup>5</sup>

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## God and History

TO SPEAK of history at all is to speak of a philosophy of history. Where there is no philosophy, that is, where there is no basic pattern discernible, there is nothing but a series of unrelated events each occurring by chance, or chains of interrelated processes.

Every major world view and every world religion has its own basic theory according to which the events of man's life are interpreted. That is to say, every world view and every world religion has a philosophy of history. To none of these is the philosophy of history more important than to Christianity. The relevance of the church to contemporary life may well be closely bound up with the adequacy of the church's philosophy of history.

### I

#### Judaeo-Christian Interpretations of History

Judaism, the mother religion of Christianity, is essentially an *eschatological* faith. The word *eschata* means, literally, "last things." Again and again throughout the literature of the Old Testament there are references to "last things," to a future in which history is to be fulfilled through the universal reign of God.

Judaism presupposed that all history was to be understood as man and God in interaction. God was a father in the ancient oriental sense of fatherhood who not only loved but who ruled his children and punished them, sometimes very severely but always with a view to their ultimate good. Both successes and failures were to be seen against a background of these presuppositions.

When the nation prospered this was interpreted as a time of obedience and deserved prosperity. In times of reversal and defeat it was clear to the Hebrew that the people had been disobedient and unfaithful and that the reverses were evidences of God's judgment and punishment for wrongdoing.

Examples of this Judaistic interpretation of history are to be found throughout the Old Testament. One of the best illustrations is Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55). This portion of Isaiah appears to have been written near the end of the Exile of the Hebrew nation to Babylon, after fifty years of captivity. There was prospect that the Jews were to be released and allowed to return to their homeland. Cyrus, a young and vigorous military commander, had defeated the Babylonians and wherever the rule of Cyrus was instigated the peoples were permitted to carry on their native customs and to observe their native religions. Captives were permitted to return home and normal patterns of life were immediately resumed. The writer of Second Isaiah looked upon the entire sequence of the original conquest of Palestine by Babylon, with fifty years of captivity, and now the prospect of release by Cyrus, as fulfilment of the will of God. The original defeat at the hands of Babylon was clear evidence that the people had been unfaithful and the defeat by Babylon was the judgment of God. The fifty years of captivity, involving the adoption of Babylonian customs and intermarriage among some Jews and Babylonians, were the long suffering years of God's punishment. But now the punishment of the Lord had been fulfilled and Cyrus came as the servant of God to release the Jews from captivity.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.<sup>1</sup>

1. Isaiah 40:1-2.

Such interpretation of God's constant participation in the events of life is characteristic of the entire understanding of human events as contained in the Old Testament.

Judaism also has always been much aware not only of the future fulfilment of God's plans but of his present reign, no matter what the reverses are and no matter how strong evil may appear. Some of the best examples of the sharp awareness and the deep faith in God's control despite contradictory evidence are to be found in the Psalms, especially such Psalms as 93, 97, and 99.

Christianity inherited from Judaism this conviction of God's mastery of history. Christian eschatology looks beyond not only the events of today but beyond even the final chapters of human history. The ultimate fulfilment of God's relationship to man is to be seen in terms of eternity rather than in terms of human history here and now.

Dr. L. Harold DeWolf maintains that the fundamental emphasis in the New Testament, however, is not on "last things" but upon fulfilment of ends and purposes. He writes:

When Jesus, as reported in the Synoptic Gospels, and Paul, as he writes in his letters, discuss the future, they do not customarily speak of "last things." No form of the word *eschat* appears in the Synoptic Gospels in an eschatological sense. There is only one such occurrence in the writings of Paul, namely, in the mention of "the last trumpet," in I Corinthians 15:52. Those who assign II Timothy to Paul would find a second occurrence in II Timothy 3:1. Both Jesus and Paul speak repeatedly of the *telos*, or "end," especially "purposive end." In view of these facts, contemporary theologians would be more faithful to the new testament revelation if they devoted more attention to teleology, the study of purposed ends, and less to eschatology, the study of last things. *Telos*, to be sure, may be a termination or conclusion. More characteristically, as well as by etymological relation, it implies a purposed goal, fulfilment, or consumation.<sup>a</sup>

2. L. Harold DeWolf. A CASE FOR THEOLOGY IN LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE, 165. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959.

Thus the end spoken of frequently in the New Testament is not annihilation of goals. Individual life and historical processes are to be *fulfilled* in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is neither wholly here nor wholly beyond history. An accurate reading of the New Testament makes clear that the Kingdom of God is here and now but is also the ultimate future of man. Christian eschatology, therefore, is an eschatology of fulfillment which begins now and progresses into eternity.

## II

### The Uniqueness of Christ

No other human life has been the subject of such utterly exhaustive and painstaking research as that of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet no life remains as great a mystery as that life. This is not merely because the historical facts available at this remote point in time are few. Even if it were possible to develop an altogether authentic and detailed biography of Jesus of Nazareth his life would still be a mystery.

The facts concerning Jesus' life are common knowledge. He was known as the son of the carpenter, Joseph of Nazareth and Joseph's wife Mary. He was in every sense first a boy growing up in Nazareth, and then a man, pursuing the trade of his carpenter father. His impact upon his contemporaries leaves no doubt that he was a man of unusual capacity and personal attractiveness. He was well versed in the Hebrew scriptures and he developed an increasing concern about the distortion of his Judaistic heritage at the hands of contemporary religious leaders who had become minions of Rome. His emphasis upon the love of God and the concern of God for human travail drew to him the masses of suffering, lonely, and fearful humanity. His emphasis upon the identification of righteousness with social justice alienated the religious leaders of his time and made it possible for them to represent him as a dangerous revolutionary to the Roman governors.



This Jesus of Nazareth was tried before the high court of the Jewish state (the Sanhedrin) and was finally condemned to execution by Pilate, the Roman procurator stationed in Jerusalem. The entire span of his life included no more than thirty-three years.

That this particular teacher among all teachers in Asia, or that this particular death among the many martyrdoms of that period, should be so long remembered and regarded as somehow exceptional is itself a most amazing fact. Yet the uniqueness of Jesus' life and death has always been the conviction around which the Christian faith has developed. Today also the mission of the Christian church to the world must find its basic justification in the claim that God acted uniquely on man's behalf in Jesus Christ and that God's own nature and will for man were uniquely revealed in Christ. The Christian faith, if it is to be what it claims to be, cannot be one religion among others. The Christian church cannot be one body of believers alongside many bodies of believers. Absolutely indispensable to what the Christian faith proclaims itself to be is the faith that God acted *uniquely* in Jesus Christ. Wherein lies this uniqueness?

The ground of the uniqueness of Christ has never been adequately stated in words nor has the entire body of the Christian church been in agreement regarding any single statement of the nature of that uniqueness. Again and again the church has tried after prayer and soul-searching to formulate this conviction in words that would be both adequate and enduring. One of the oldest attempts at such statement was the Nicene Creed (381). In this statement Christ was made identical with God himself, was viewed as co-existent with God in creation, becoming "incarnate by the Holy Ghost in the Virgin Mary."

The Council of Chalcedon (451) proclaimed Jesus to be "truly God and truly man," with each nature complete, neither absorbed nor diminished by the other, both natures being wholly present in a single person. This

utterly paradoxical metaphysical viewpoint, while philosophically difficult, seemed to the Christians of the fifth century to be required by their understanding and experience of God in Christ.

There have been other approaches to defining and accounting for the uniqueness of Christ. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought the fundamentalist emphasis upon the Virgin Birth as both the clue to Jesus' true nature and the criterion for genuine Christian faith.

Also in the middle years of the twentieth century came a resurgence of Reformation theology, the development of Barthian *crisis* theology, and the impact of existentialism upon the whole of theological thought. Within the milieu of mid-twentieth century theology great emphasis has been put upon the self-validating nature of the *Event*, meaning the incarnation of God in Christ, which divides history into *before* and *after*. The life and death of Jesus, according to this point of view, derive their exceptional nature from an altogether miraculous intervention of the transcendent God into human history, an event according to which all subsequent history is to be understood and the fulfilment of which is the ultimate end of all human history.

So far as capturing the uniqueness of Christ in verbal symbols, there is no wholly satisfactory statement. The validity of the claim fortunately does not depend upon a closely reasoned explanation, theological or scientific, of how it could be. The validity of the Christian claim to Christ's uniqueness rests upon two fundamental and undeniable facts: The first is the profound changes which occur in the personalities of persons who take as the guiding principle of their lives the claim that God is revealed in Christ. The other is the undeniable and altogether unique impact Jesus Christ has made upon human history.

Of special significance to a Christian philosophy of history is the meaning of the cross, especially of God's

role in that tragedy. Here again, Christians differ. Some have held to a view that reflects more closely the Hebrew heritage: that the triumph of evil over goodness represented there was an expression of the will of God, that God foresaw, arranged and used the crucifixion as a means of revealing his infinite love while simultaneously exacting the supreme penalty for human sin.

Others have seen the cross as a genuine tragedy, as a violation of God's will, and as a free act whose responsibility must be borne wholly by those human agents who brought it about. Sin was triumphant. Righteousness and value and love were hung upon a cross to die. This was defeat, disgrace and rejection; yet it was through this evil which God did not create, but by which God was not defeated, that God acted most tellingly for man's salvation. Every time the Christian looks upon a cross he should be reminded that there was a dark day when the most profound word that God could speak to man had to be spoken through the triumph of sin. In this view (to which I subscribe) the power of the cross is not found in pity or sentiment for a martyr's death (commendable though they be) but rather in a demonstration that goodness crucified is stronger than evil triumphant.

### III

#### **Christian Responsibility and the Idea of Progress**

The Christian is under heavy responsibility to live out his faith that God now reigns and will overcome all evil. Christian action often must be through institutions and political organizations. Yet the Christian's ultimate loyalty belongs only to God and his faith is in God's loving faithfulness. It is not simple or easy to accept immediate responsibility and to act with the expectation that what we do really matters while at the same time understanding that success or failure lie in God's hands and not our own. Often the Christian community has lost sight of its ultimate commitments and has confused the will

of God with human judgments whose shortsightedness has soon been demonstrated. On the other hand, sometimes the call to responsibility has been muted by the contention that Christian action, while obligatory, does not really serve the will of God, since real change is possible on his initiative alone. If the Christian faith is to make any justifiable claim on the loyalty and resources of thoughtful people, each of these distortions must be avoided. The Christian must live as though God now reigns, to love and to draw men into communities of love. The criteria for Christian social responsibility must be complete dedication to God's will insofar as we can understand it and love for our neighbors.

This responsibility cannot be wholly fulfilled in any simple application of love on an individual and personal level. There are no simple answers to complex questions and there is no easy and direct means whereby the impact of love can be brought into many of the problems in which contemporary man is caught. The application of Christian love to many of the basic current problems requires extensive technical competence.

Yet, even with loving competence results will not be wholly satisfactory. Deeply entrenched social wrongs and behavior patterns buttressed by distrust and fear are not easily dislodged. Often the response to Christian love skillfully and guilelessly extended will be hesitancy, suspicion, or aggression. So complex and confusing are the situations of our time and so garbled are our means of communication that we must not expect the clear-cut and simple results of ministering to an ill neighbor. If we are to serve our time without becoming disillusioned and frustrated we must anticipate limited and even negative responses to some of our most skillful and well intentioned efforts.

Our American expectation of "progress" in all things makes it difficult to be realistic about what may be achieved within a brief period. Our national history of rapid growth and expansion has led us to expect that

every effort which is vigorously prosecuted will bring swift achievement. Much of the time we have believed that it was our "manifest destiny" to subdue a wilderness and swiftly to establish a just and affluent society. Yet the very idea of progress, even of slow evolvment, is a comparatively recent idea. It is significant that from the time of Aristotle (384-322, B.C.) until that of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) Western philosophy paid but scant attention to any concept of progressive change in human affairs. Neither was there any significant reference to progress in the works of the classical theologians.

Within the past two hundred years in America we have developed a conception not only of evolvment but of rapid and precipitious "progress" in all areas of endeavor. It is with such background that we speak glibly of "bringing in the Kingdom of God within our generation." It is also such conviction that causes us naively to launch our great evangelistic campaigns in the expectation that within a few years the final evangelization of the world may be achieved. Of all these naive and altogether misleading expectations we must divest ourselves if we are to live realistically in the face of the kinds of powerful opposition the church now faces in its work of witnessing to the world.

On the other hand it should not be supposed that patterned change in human affairs is unreal. The movement of history has sometimes been so slow as to be undiscernible for a century or more. At other times change has been as swift and as far-reaching as a huge tidal wave sweeping along the shore of a continent. We have noted that ours is a moment of history when change is cataclysmic. But this cannot be thought of necessarily as progress. It may be regression and it may result in destruction of much that has been wrought through the centuries. It may force a retreat in the work of the church and it may even cause God himself to move in a new and definitive manner; or, the revolution now in

progress may melt and dislodge the ice that has formed within and without the church and open the way to a new effectiveness in witness at all levels of life and in all the complex structures of contemporary society. The present revolution, therefore, may be of God.

#### **IV**

#### **Love, Judgment, and Obedience**

The most misleading aspect of the current Western conception of progress is that it contradicts and is contradicted by the central thrust of the Judaeo-Christian conception of history. Whereas the current idea of progress presupposes that efficient effort properly mobilized will inevitably result in the achievement of the objective and that such achievement is in turn evidence of the favor and blessing of God, the Judaeo-Christian conception of history has always taken account of divine judgment as well as divine love. Many times when the goals and the structures of human society have seemed to be succeeding most satisfactorily, events which at their inception have appeared to speed this success have proved to be the instruments whereby accomplishment has been thwarted. The Christian faith has taken account of such periodic confusion and defeat. Any adequate contemporary Christian philosophy of history must include the possibility of suffering, defeat, and death as the doors through which we must pass in fulfilment of God's will for our time and our nation.

We cannot understand God's actions by reference to our own material values, our national loyalty, or our social, racial, or ethnic commitments. We cannot identify the will of God with what we are doing or what we want or the commitments we have made in the affairs of men. Our own history is replete with examples of such erroneous identification between the will of God and the will of man. This was especially true of the early Puritans in America. For them such virtues as honesty in business

dealings, industry, frugality, and abhorrence of all things "worldly" were approved by God, and therefore could be expected to result in economic prosperity, family solidarity, and political stability. Poverty, political revolt, and breakdown in family relationships were evidences of God's disfavor. From these preconceptions it was only a step to identifying one's own purposes and achievements with God's will and favor. This step was regularly and almost inevitably taken.

There are other examples of a more naive and flagrant nature. In time of war American Christians have been particularly quick to declare that the Kingdom of God is dependent upon if not identical with the military success of their cause. During the Civil War THE WESTERN CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE (August 6, 1862) carried a near-hysterical editorial of which the following is a typical paragraph:

The index finger on the great dial-plate that counts and reveals the movement of ages, to-day points to the hour in which your nation's doom for the next thousand years is cast; and it is for you, young man, to say what that doom shall be. Shall it be Union, Peace, Brotherhood, Liberty, Freedom, and equalizing, humanizing Christianity? Or shall it be disunion, war, selfishness, slavery, and a besotted, barbarous, brutalizing, bastard corruption and perversion of our holy religion? You, young men, must decide it.<sup>3</sup>

It must be repeated that man cannot properly identify his own projects with the will of God nor measure God's favor or the success of God's purposes by reference to man's own achievement. This has disturbing application to our own situation in mid-twentieth century. Because the Soviet system takes as its philosophical foundation an atheistic interpretation of life we in the West have quickly labeled communism as anti-God and have identi-

3. Cited by William W. Sweet, METHODISM IN AMERICAN HISTORY, 291. New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1933.

fied the Kingdom of God and the success of God's efforts among men with our own socio-political pattern and its success in the world. As Christians with an adequate grasp of a philosophy of history we must face the disturbing possibility that the will of God includes world triumph of communism in the twentieth century! Such a possibility lies within the scope of a philosophy that understands judgment as well as love.

It is also possible that triumph of tyranny, communistic or other, will mark a genuine defeat of the righteous as did Calvary. We must ask ourselves whether a new triumph of evil power is all that will purge the church of its debilitating alliance with wealth and position. Must capitalism, democracy, and the twentieth century church pass through the door of death in order that the will of God may move unencumbered among men? This is a possibility we must face. Must goodness and righteousness die that the vision of God may again be brought into focus and the prophetic message of confession, repentance, reconciliation be heard above the distortions and confusion of a market place culture?

Neither of these possibilities—world communism triumphant as an expression of God's judgment, or world communism triumphant as evil triumphed on Calvary—require or even allow the Christian to be quiescent in the face of the communist challenge. Responsibility requires that we face that challenge with strength and courage. Turning the other cheek may not be the right act for a Christian assuming political responsibility in the twentieth century. Those who would seriously seek God's will in this century may find themselves called to relevant life rather than death. Yet the knowledge that God has the final word, that our highest understandings may fall short of his will, and that our defeat may open new channels for God to act, must be ever before us.



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CHRISTIANITY AND THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY.

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## Toward a Contemporary Philosophy of History

TO SPEAK of obedience to the will of God, or of accepting his love and judgment, is to make some interpretation of his will and of his present action. The current resurgent emphasis upon the revelation of God in Christ as the ultimate interpretation of history is not adequate. It is not enough to speak of an event—even of an *EVENT*—which occurred two thousand years ago and from which all historical meaning is to be derived. While we cannot prejudge God's actions, therefore must always see his movement more clearly by hindsight than foresight, we must make some interpretation of what he is doing in the present. This must not be merely theological generalization regarding the meaning of the incarnation. If the Christian church is to fulfil its prophetic function it must understand the will of God in relation to the events of our time and to the decisions which these events call forth. Hence we are brought to the necessity of attempting a philosophy of contemporary history.

### I

#### Dialectic of Personality

The basic thesis in the approach which will be developed here is suggested in the following quotation from Hegel:

The history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom; a progress whose development ac-

according to the necessity of its nature it is our business to investigate.<sup>1</sup>

This calls for an understanding of the Hegelian use of the term freedom. The mere opportunity to do as one pleases, in this conception, is not freedom. A man afloat in the middle of the ocean on a raft is under no restraint from society. He may have food enough and water to last for some time and a canvas for shelter, yet he is restrained not only by the vastness of the ocean around him but by his very separation from society. In a very real sense the human person in isolation is not free; indeed, he is not in the full sense a person. Freedom becomes real as one lives in a structured society in which personality has an opportunity to express and fulfil itself.

If our man on the raft happens to be a creative composer and musician his limitations are especially pronounced. Such a person can be free, that is can fulfil potentialities within him, only in a highly organized society. Only within such a context can persons be freed from the elementary struggle for food, shelter and clothing in order to compose and learn to play music. Only here will there be persons interested enough to pay to hear great music, only here will there be other musicians to form an orchestra. It is in living in a structured society, accepting its patterns of social relationships, contributing to its life, and being enabled to express oneself that freedom becomes real.

There are other uses of the term freedom which must be specifically disowned in order that its meaning here be kept in focus. For one thing, the above reference to the system of Hegel should not mislead the philosophically literate reader to expect that I am an "Hegelian" or that what will follow will be an Hegelian philosophy of history. Each of these is far from the fact. One impor-

1. Georg W. F. Hegel, *PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY*, 63-64. A LIBRARY OF UNIVERSAL LITERATURE, Part I, Volume XII. New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1901.

tant difference with Hegel arises in some further development of the term freedom. For Hegel, freedom is achieved through the highly organized, carefully structured state, whose governance is benevolent reason. My own view is based on what I believe to be a more accurately Christian doctrine of man. Not only benevolent reason, but obedience to the will of God is requisite to freedom. In fact, responsible obedience to God is crucial. The reason of man is not the reason of God, and is therefore imperfect. The will of man lacks the integrity of God, and therefore must be obedient rather than wholly autonomous if it is to be free. This is no denial of personal responsibility. Rather, it is responsibility in which the guidance of perfect reason and integrity is sought and accepted.

There are also adulterations of the term freedom which must be understood and avoided. German National Socialism employed the term in a complete inversion of its true meaning to refer to blind obedience to an irrational State (cf. quotation in Chapter Five). Communists also distort and thus destroy the term by using it to describe the supposed utopian life within the collectivist society.

The discussion of this chapter requires an understanding of another term, namely, dialectic. The dialectic as introduced by Hegel and as employed by Karl Marx is an analysis of process within a developing universe. The dialectic is composed of three parts, a thesis, an antithesis, and a synthesis. The thesis is any starting point; a woman, for instance. The antithesis is any other object or being related to or opposed to the thesis; for instance, a man. The synthesis is the product which emerges as the thesis and antithesis meet and become intimately inter-related. Following our present illustration the synthesis might be a child, as a man and woman meet and through their relationships cease to be individuals but become first partners to a marriage and then parents. Sometimes the dialectic operates as a process of unfolding as in the

case of the bud on an apple tree as the thesis, the blossom the antithesis, and the apple the synthesis. Sometimes the dialectic proceeds through struggle as in the Marxian interpretation of history in which the bourgeoisie is the thesis, the proletariat is the antithesis, and the communist classless society is the synthesis.

It is my conviction that in the nature of reality there is a dialectic at work. Many studies in the present day indicate ever more strongly the necessity of a process metaphysics and a process philosophy of human history. The dialectic of history, in my understanding, is a constant struggle, an emergence of life and freedom and self-fulfilment. This is neither exclusively a dialectic of absolute Spirit as conceived by Hegel, nor a dialectical materialism described by Marx. Rather, it is a dialectic of personality; a travail of body and mind in which all of reality continually labors together to give birth to the potentials of personality. This conception of history is not really a novel one. There have been a number of philosophies of history in which the principle of some dialectic has been noted; for instance the historical understandings of Judaism, Augustine, Marx, Toynbee, Niebuhr, and Whitehead, to mention only a few.

According to the view now being developed, we do not understand human history until we recognize in it God's effort to bring to reality the higher potentials of human personality and man's somewhat faltering and flickering cooperation. Sometimes man's response is resistance. God is at work in human history, yet God is limited in his efforts by man. The very fact that God creates man with the capacity to will and choose entails God's permission to use those capacities even though man often proves infantile and perverse in such use. Despite man's faltering intelligence and will, God still finds those persons and those societies who will cooperate with him, and through them he persuades and leads man slowly, painfully, toward man's higher possibilities of fulfilment. In this respect God works after the

fashion of a great teacher. He does not manipulate men as puppets in a cosmic Punch and Judy show. He does not solve men's problems for them nor condemn bitterly for their mistakes. Rather, God is constantly opening up before men who will see, new vistas of possibility. He is forever supporting efforts to move upward toward freedom, forever correcting errors, and penalizing failures.

God in his wisdom appears also to be able to use human perversity when this is the only course through which God's will for men's ultimate fulfilment can move forward. More than once God has found it necessary to act in defeat, disgrace, and death, utilizing the perversity that dominant evil created.

Herein, it seems to me, is the fundamental meaning of the ferment of our time; deep-rooting and far-reaching struggle of the human personality for fulfilment. Any polity or economy or culture which gets in the road of the struggle will be destroyed either from within or from without. The struggle will move forward. If it cannot move through social instrumentalities well adapted to evolve with the movement it will move through violence, bloodshed, revolution. Every status quo which attempts to halt this development is doomed, whether it be a political distatorship, a nationalism, or an economic system. Men feel the thrust for freedom; they do not wholly understand it nor are they possessed of the patience of God. Therefore men will continue the struggle, sometimes in blind destruction and self-contradiction. And God, suffering and sorrowing in man's travail, will be on the side of freedom.

The history of the dialectic is the history of God's creativity. Its extension is all of reality. The formation of the universe was the dialectic at work. The ages-long evolutionary development from the most simple forms to highly complex forms of life were God's creative processes. As we become increasingly aware of neighboring planets and contemplate interplanetary travel we must prepare ourselves philosophically (as well as psychologi-

cally and technologically) for the discovery of other forms of life, perhaps far more advanced than our own. The God of such a universe must not only be a god of immense power, but also of highly complex purposes and vast resourcefulness. The creative activity of God doubtless includes many projects and purposes of which we can have neither knowledge nor imagination. The expression of God's creativity which affects us most distinctly now is the struggle of personality for freedom. That person or that nation who would do the will of God must join that struggle.

This interpretation of human history is at least as ancient as the Hebrew prophets. The unknown writer of Second Isaiah had this understanding of God's will for his time and wrote:

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons, from the prison those who sit in darkness."<sup>2</sup>

This also was at the heart of the message of Jesus concerning God's will for man. When he was asked regarding the fundamental requirement for entrance into the kingdom of God he spoke in a parable of a great Judgment, in which all the peoples of the earth were drawn up before the Lord. And the peoples were divided, one group on the right hand and one on the left hand of God. To those on the left hand the Lord denied entrance into the kingdom of heaven because they had been callous and unfeeling in their treatment of persons. And to those on the other hand the Lord said, "Come, O blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom

2. Isaiah 42:5-7.

prepared for you. . . . For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous answered him, "Lord when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?" And the king answered, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." <sup>3</sup> This is not merely a prescription for individual good-doing. Rather, it is a profound statement of the fundamental meaning of doing the will of God and thus achieving a quality of life that has eternal worth.

There have been continual expressions of the dialectic of freedom at work through the years. The following instances are illustrative:

1. The classical Greeks, in limited degree. They understood many of the potentials within the personality of man. Yet they suffered both from cultural astigmatism and from an inability to understand the fundamental incoherence and evil of human slavery.
2. Giordano Bruno may be regarded as representative of a period in which men struggled to break out of the theological straitjackets of the late Middle Ages into a freer thought which was both source and product of new explorations in science and philosophy. The Inquisition burned Bruno at the stake in 1600 because of his rejection of Roman Catholicism and his intellectual struggle to make room in his mind both for the new astronomy and a conception of God great enough to be the creator and controller of a universe now seen to be so vast.

3. Matthew 25:35-39.



3. Copernicus and Galileo stand also in this struggle for freedom to think and to explore unencumbered by ancient theological presuppositions.
4. The period of the Renaissance, with the rediscovery of artistic and cultural capacities which the long era of ecclesiastical domination had deadened, must also be thought of as an expression and an advance of the dialectic probing for freedom.
5. Martin Luther, particularly in the early days of his revolt against Roman Catholicism and his courageous stand against both ecclesiastical and political forces, was a champion of the free and responsible human spirit.
6. The work of John Locke in developing the idea of government by contract, of the inalienable rights of men to be free, of the power of government derived from the consent of the governed, of government by reason and law as opposed to absolute power and royal fiat, provided a major philosophical foundation for the struggle for political freedom.
7. Both the American and French Revolutions, influenced as they were by the theories of Locke, must be regarded as expressions of the dialectic seeking freedom. The French Revolution particularly was a classic instance in which men, denied freedom and human dignity through peaceful and legal channels, come at last to violent and irrational overthrow of the powers which restrain them.
8. The struggle toward the dignity of first-class citizenship for the American Negro has been another expression of the dialectical at work. The debates and legal maneuvers in the early nineteenth century, the American Civil War, the feeble beginnings in the late nineteenth century to provide schools and other training for the Negro, the twentieth century struggle for the right to vote and to exercise other civil rights, the 1954 decision of the

United States Supreme Court regarding segregated public education, the hundreds of court cases which have emerged following that decision, the sit-in demonstrations of the Negro students of the 1960's, the mass demonstrations in Birmingham and elsewhere, must all be understood within this context. If the past 150 years have taught us anything, it should be that the evil of enslaving the Negro will hound us until we allow his freedom to be a reality.

9. The growth and expansion of the American and British labor movements, especially their early struggles on behalf of laboring people who were regarded as commodities to be bought and sold, have made their contributions to the movement of freedom.
10. The Chinese Revolutions, first under Sun Yat-Sen and again under Mao Tze-Tung, are expressions of the yearning of the Chinese masses for freedom and fulfilment. That these efforts issued only in new tyrannies makes the story of China a twentieth century tragedy. But the last word has not been spoken in China.
11. The land reforms throughout the world in England, Japan, Iran and many other places have come, not voluntarily but nonetheless inexorably as peasants have thrown off the yokes of feudalism and have sought fulfilment as men.
12. The heroic and dramatic struggle of Mahatma Gandhi to free his vast land from the domination of even benevolent colonialism was one of the most dramatic expressions of the dialectic in the twentieth century.
13. The contemporary struggle, confusion, and bloodshed in Africa must be understood within this same conception. The turmoil which is Africa will not calm until political and economic domination of European powers are thrown off, until Soviet

interests cease to utilize the yearning of the African for freedom, and until at last genuinely responsible and dignified freedom for the masses of Africa is a reality.

Certainly not all of the expressions of response to the dialectic cited above have been well advised, nor have they all served well the cause of freedom. But well advised or not, the yearning to be free is an integral part of the nature of reality, an expression of the power of God at work in human affairs, and when men find themselves thwarted or unreasonably delayed in their response to this divine call they will at last act, sometimes in wisdom and foresight and sometimes in shortsighted, ill-advised, and self-defeating ways; but they will act.

The thought that there is in the very nature of things, as an expression of the ultimate will of God, a thrust for freedom and personal fulfilment for all peoples is a frightening idea, especially to those who see their own interests bound up with some status quo. Herein we find a basis for understanding the Inquisition, the purges within the Soviet Union, McCarthyism in America, and all similar efforts to suppress the free spirit. Clearly, the real concern of those who responded to McCarthy was not communism, however much they may have thought so. And the real concern of the white Citizens' Councils is not racial mixture. The common enemy of all reactionism is the challenge to political, economic, ecclesiastical, or social rigidities which stifle free personality. Reactionaries behave as mentally unstable persons controlled by persistent anxiety because they see everywhere the status quo, on which they believe their own values to be dependent, challenged as never before.

## II

### **The Dialectic in Current History**

Pursuing the thesis here developed, current history is not to be understood naively as a struggle of democracy

versus communism, but as the somewhat frightening dialectic of human personality reaching for self-fulfilment and for social, economic, and moral patterns which help realize and maintain such fulfilment all over the world. If this interpretation be correct, it becomes tremendously important to re-examine our position as a nation and as individuals in this dialectic.

The birth struggle of our own nation was one of the expressions of that dialectic at work. Among the convictions which motivated our founding fathers there were some which continue to have validity:

1. A belief in one world under a rational, ethical God.
2. An expectation that man can know something of God's will and labor for its fulfilment.
3. A recognition of the individual man as the ultimate unit of value, and judgment of institutions according to what happens to individuals because of them.
4. A conviction that sovereignty rests primarily with the individual and that he may delegate that sovereignty to a government designed to serve the best interests of all, and withdraw sovereignty when the government fails or refuses to accomplish its just end.
5. A practical understanding of man's weaknesses and the accompanying necessity that government be safeguarded not only against tyranny but also against popular caprice.
6. Freedom of the individual conscience in religious matters.

With such principles as guides we might expect to play a constructive and coherent part in the contemporary movement of the dialectic. If we are concerned, as we might well be, regarding the characteristics of the free society in which human personality would have an opportunity to fulfil itself, perhaps we will find them best stated in the Declaration of Human Rights drawn up by the UNESCO Committee on Human Rights, 1947:

The right to live

The right to the protection of health

The right to work  
The right to property  
The right to information  
Freedom of thought  
The right to free inquiry  
The right to self-expression  
The right to justice  
The right to political action  
Freedom of speech, assembly, association, worship and  
the press  
The right to citizenship  
The right to rebellion or revolution under uncorrected  
injustice  
The right to share progress.

For each of the above rights there is a corresponding responsibility. Personality is free only within a structured social order, and such an order can be maintained only when mature responsibilities of citizenship are accepted and fulfilled.

Is there reason to hope that such a society will come in our time? The only answer one can give at the moment is no. The dialectic of the free personality will operate, the struggle will proceed, but the contradictions are too numerous and too powerful to permit hope for an early synthesis. Our age may advance the cause of freedom or it may inhibit that cause. Yet if our age fails to contribute, the free society will not be forever lost. If we obstruct the dialectic our polity, economy, and society will be destroyed by their own internal contradictions, but the society of freedom will not be lost, for God himself is on the side of freedom and God has plenty of time!

### III

#### **A Christian Understanding of the Contemporary Scene**

A Christian philosophy of history has always been a qualified optimism. The Christian always thinks in terms of the ultimate triumph of righteousness, yet he does

not expect unbroken success nor easy victory. He does not profess to be wise enough and good enough to be constant in his own devotion to the will of God, and he understands that the weaknesses and failures of his own time are real because decisions are made and actions are taken by persons very much like himself.

Earlier we called attention to the fact that we cannot deduce God's actions by reference to our own material values, our national loyalties, our social, racial, or ethnic commitments, "our way of life." We cannot identify the will of God with what we want.

With this understanding before us it is difficult to make a genuinely Christian interpretation of present events. The present scene is a confused and confusing one. Preparations for war are made in the name of peace. Peoples are kept in bondage in the name of security and freedom. In many areas of the world the absolute dictatorship of Russian Communism professes to succeed where democracy failed as the savior of backward peoples and the redeemer of dying economies. Often as not churchmen, if not the church, are on the side of reaction and discrimination in the struggles of the Negro in America and Africa for the full stature of human dignity. History teaches that when men of good will and integrity to high principles cannot be found or are thwarted, the dialectic of freedom works through human perversity, and out of a time of apparently triumphant evil a new advance for the cause of freedom emerges, though obliquely.

The call of the church is to be relevant to its time. It must not only speak poetically about a community of reconciling love; it must make such a community a concrete fact in the midst of human events. The final meaning of our time, the success of the efforts of free men in and outside the church, the persons through whom God will work, are all matters about which we in the church must not profess keen insight because it is not ours. Yet we may be sure that God is on the side of freedom and that

he is neither confused nor defeated.

The fundamental faith of the Christian for such a time of crisis was given classic form by St. Paul:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth, or anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>4</sup>

### *Selected Readings Related to Chapter Four*

Adler, Mortimer J.

THE IDEA OF FREEDOM.

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Augustine.

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FREE WILL, RESPONSIBILITY, AND GRACE.

New York: Abingdon Press, 1957.

Hegel, G. W. F.

PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY.

New York: P. T. Collier and Son, 1901.

Kolbe, Henry E.

ONE WORLD UNDER GOD.

New York: Abingdon Press, 1963.

Locke, John.

TREATISE ON GOVERNMENT.

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4. Romans 8:35-39.

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RELIGION AND FREEDOM IN THE MODERN WORLD.

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Niebuhr, Reinhold.

THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT AND THE CHILDREN OF DARK-  
NESS.

New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944.

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New York: The Vanguard Press, 1944.

Whitehead, Alfred North.

PROCESS AND REALITY.

New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929.



## What Is the Church?

THERE HAS never been a time in Christendom when all Christians have agreed on the exact nature of the church. Several contrasting views will illustrate this point:

When it is asked what is this Kingdom of which Christ spoke, there can be but one answer. It is His Church, the society of those who accept His Divine legation and admit His right to the obedience of faith which He claimed. His whole activity is directed to the establishment of such a society. . . . To the Church Christ has given the means of grace He merited by His life and death. She communicates them to her members, and those who are outside her fold she bids to enter that they too may participate in them. By these means of grace—the light of revealed truth, the sacraments, the perpetual renewal of the Sacrifice of Calvary—the Church carries on the work of sanctifying the elect. . . . The Church alone dispenses the sacraments. It alone makes known the light of revealed truth. Outside the Church these gifts cannot be obtained. From all this there is but one conclusion: Union with the Church is not merely one out of various means by which salvation may be obtained: It is the only means. . . . It has been shown . . . that Christ established His Church as an organized society under accredited leaders, and that He commanded its rulers and all those who should succeed them to summon all men to secure their eternal salvation by entry into it. . . . Her members all over the world are united by the profession of common faith, by participation in a common worship, and by obedience to a common authority. . . .

The authority established in the Church holds its commission from above, not from below. The pope and bishops exercise their power as the successors of the men who were chosen by

Christ in person. . . . As the divinely appointed teacher of revealed truth, the Church is infallible. . . . Christ's words to St. Peter, "I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven," distinctly express the gift of jurisdiction. Supreme authority over a body carries with it the right to govern and direct. The three elements which go to constitute jurisdiction—legislative power, judicial power, and coercive power—are, moreover, all implicit in Christ's directions to the apostles.<sup>1</sup>

In startling contrast is a statement by "The German Christians," who represented some leaders among German Protestant churches at the time of the rise of Hitlerism. This group issued what was called "the platform of the German Christians" in 1932, containing ten points which clearly link the German church with the fortunes and goals of Nazism. This platform begins: "1. These directives are to point out to all believing Germans the ways and goals by which they can attain a new order in the church." Points 5 and 10 and the concluding paragraph illustrate very clearly this fascist conception of the church as an instrument of sanctification for self-conscious nationalism.

5. We want to bring to the fore in our church the reawakened German feeling for life and to make our church life of positive value for life. In the fateful battle for German freedom and future, the church has shown itself too weak in its leadership. The church has not yet marshalled for decisive battle against the God-hating Marxism and the foreign-spirited Center Party (Zentrum), but instead reached an agreement with the political parties which represent these forces. We want our church to

1. THE CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA, vol. III, 746-755. New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1908. (The Ecumenical Council convened by Pope John XXIII and continued by Pope Paul VI has brought these historic doctrines of the Church under careful re-examination and debate. At this writing it is too early to know how if at all the official views of the Roman Catholic Church, especially on the necessity of the church to salvation, will have been altered. It will be of great importance to follow carefully all official Catholic statements and interpretations on such topics.)

fight in the forefront in the decisive struggle for the existence or extinction of our nation. She dare not stand aside or indeed shy away from the fighters for freedom.

10. We want an Evangelical Church which roots in the national character, and we repudiate the spirit of a Christian cosmopolitanism. We want to overcome the corrupt developments which have sprung from this spirit—such as pacifism, internationalism, Freemasonry, etc.—through faith in the national mission given us by God. Membership of an Evangelical minister in a lodge of Free Masons is not to be allowed.

These ten points of the "German Christians" are a call to rally, and they constitute in great outline the direction of the future Evangelical National Church (Reichskirche), which by the maintaining of confessional peace will develop the powers of our Reformation faith into the finest of the German nation.

(signed) Hossenfelder, clergyman \*

A third suggestion of the nature of the church is to be found in a letter written by Karl Barth to Johannes Hamel, a pastor in the East German zone. The pastor had raised with Barth the question of the duty of the church in a Communist land. A paragraph relevant to our interests follows:

God above all things! He is the One who has willed and ordained that the Christian Church be both confident and joyful in the midst of mankind to have a gift and a task even under the domination of an alien power, a socialism that is inspired and directed by Moscow! An alien power? Yes, but not only an alien power. This power in all its characteristics can be but God's instrument, inescapably fulfilling a function in his plan. The judicial function of a rod of discipline? Yes, even this function. This power would not have gained control over you had it not been for all the sins of past leaders and people

2. These points were written by a German clergyman who signed himself, Hossenfelder. Cited in Franklin H. Littell's *THE GERMAN PHOENIX*, pp. 180-183. New York: Doubleday and Co., 1960. Dr. Littell states that since the Second World War Hossenfelder has served as a leader of a group of clergymen collaborating with the Communists in East Germany.

in society, state, and church. You are assuredly undergoing a painful process of purification and fiery refining, such as the Western world also will not escape sooner or later in some form, perhaps at the hands of Asia and Africa. But who sits in judgment? Not the instrument, but the One who uses it and holds it in his hand, the gracious and merciful One who even when he is angry and punishes, and especially then, does not desire that anyone be lost, but that all, Christians and non-Christians, be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He judges only because he loves us and in order to bless us. Is there any hope for a turn for the better in your brand of socialism? Why not? But the West German radio might also be right with its mumbling and grumbling that nowhere is hope in sight. Nevertheless, hope in God is not in vain, even under the rule of socialism—over which he reigns as well, using it to further his work. The Christian Church in the East Zone of Germany might now be gathered as a people that rests its hope in God alone, without illusion or reticence or complaint, putting us all to shame at the same time encouraging us. Sooner or later this people of God will surely have reasons, large or small, for thankfulness. Perhaps, as you hint, it already has such reasons.<sup>3</sup>

The church here is neither an infallible institution necessary to salvation nor an instrument for the sanctification of nationalism. Rather, it is the congregation of "the gathered people" who must make their witness to "the truth of God" in whatever situation they find themselves. The church cannot claim the authority of institutional power without taking on the contradictory characteristics of the world in which the church must stand in judgment. Neither can the church be in league with nor a justifier of any existing economic, political, or social system. The church Barth describes in this letter is a spiritual brotherhood that must stand over against all worldly pretensions to authority, power, and truth.

A fourth understanding of the nature of the church may

3. Karl Barth and Johannes Hamel, *HOW TO SERVE GOD IN A MARXIST LAND*, 54-55. New York: Association Press, 1959.

be regarded as characteristic of contemporary American Protestantism. Dr. L. Harold DeWolf describes the church first as a spiritual entity and then as an organization within human affairs.

By the spiritual church is meant that unique and powerful fellowship of sharing created by the power of the Holy Spirit and spoken of hitherto as the *koinonia*. Far from being only an ideal or, on the other hand, a mere aggregation of individuals, it is a living community overreaching all others in extent, surpassing all others in depth of meaning, and richest of all values in the experience of its members. It is, then, closely related to the kingdom of God as already present. For it is the real spiritual fellowship of all those persons who have committed themselves to the reign of God, whose Word was made manifest in Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Dr. DeWolf holds that the true purposes of the organized church are to be derived from understanding the spiritual church. He finds these purposes to be nurture and expression of Christian love, instruction and exhortation, maintenance of communal worship and prayer, and the carrying on of corporate acts in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Which of these understandings of the church are we to presuppose as we open this discussion of the relevance of the church in the contemporary scene: the church as an infallible institution necessary to salvation, or the church as sanctifier of resurgent nationalism, or the church as the gathered community which must love and judge the world but cannot participate directly in it, or the church as a spiritual fellowship which must find its reality in the experience and acts of living persons? Before attempting to answer this question let us look briefly at the beginning and early development of the Christian church.

4. L. Harold DeWolf, *A THEOLOGY OF THE LIVING CHURCH*, 318. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953.

5. *Ibid.*, 325-326.

## The Origin and Purpose of the Church

The church, as a brotherhood of those who believed they had seen God in Jesus Christ, grew slowly and without apparent pre-planning or foresight. Jesus himself does not appear to have foreseen this development nor to have had any primary concern about starting a "new" church. He thought of himself as a Jew, standing within the tradition of the Hebrew prophets. His first concern was with his own people and with the purification of his Hebrew religious heritage. He spoke of the kingdom of God with frequency, but this can hardly be thought of as identical with the church, and certainly not with the church in any form in which we know it today. The kingdom of which he spoke had to do with the enthronement of God in the inner life of man and there is no indication that this inner devotion should find any specific expression in a human institution; certainly not in any clearly prescribed kind of human institution.

What became the church began as a form of communal life. The early disciples realized that because of their commitment to the teachings of Jesus they had to be a community apart. They could no longer accept nor be accepted by the Jewish community which was their own heritage. Early concerns had to do with arrangements for the simple necessities of life. Such organization as developed proceeded quite pragmatically without any profound theological basis. Slowly, as the early followers developed their common life and began to recognize the ramifications of the course on which they had embarked they began to think about themselves as a *church*, as the "Ecclesia," the body of Christ, the community of the chosen, through which the love of God is to be expressed in the world. In a sense, they saw themselves as the successors to Israel as the chosen community of God; chosen both for his special concern and to be unquestioning servants in the cause to which he called them.

Spiritually the early church was based on the shared and ecstatic joy which developed within their lives with the growing conviction that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. The classical conception of the spiritual nature of the church was and remains the words of the apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth:

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were heathen, you were led astray to dumb idols, however you may have been moved. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. No, there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. If one member suffers, all suffer together; If one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever else the church may be, basic is the Christian claim that the church is the body of Christ. This usually is held not only to be an apt and appropriate figure of the unity of all members of the church, but also an accurate expression of the purpose and function of the church

6. See I Corinthians 12:1-12, 26-31.

in human society. That is to say, the church is to be the instrument of Christ among men, just as the body of a person is the instrument through which that person acts in and communicates with the world of which he is a part.

It is quite significant that the most famous passage on the nature of love ever written follows directly within that same letter. Paul's beautiful and profound analysis of the true nature of Christian love is rooted wholly in his concept of the church as the body of Christ. It seems clear that he believed the church to be necessary if such love were to have reality, and that when the church is a reality this quality of Christian love will be the only level of life satisfactory to such a community.

More consistently and distinctively than any other religion in world history, Christianity has been a missionary religion. What is known as "the great commission" is found in the concluding verses of the Gospel of Matthew. The record has to do with events which occurred following the resurrection and during one of the appearances Christ made to the disciples:

And Jesus came and said to them, "all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

The early apostles took this commission seriously and set about what certainly appeared a hopeless, even an absurd task of literally preaching the gospel to all nations and calling them to repentance under God.

The church would of necessity have been missionary in nature without the passages in Matthew. Indeed, the present evidence concerning the dating of the gospels would indicate that the gospel may not have been written until the missionary enterprise of the church had been



underway for a considerable number of years. The Christian church must make its witness to the entire world because of the very nature of the Christian faith itself. The Christian must proclaim the good news that God has acted in Jesus Christ on behalf of all men and has taken the initiative to come to them in the depths of their needs. When such a conviction becomes real and when under the healing power of the love of God the Christian community is enabled to look beyond itself and feel genuine concern for the needs of mankind, it must of necessity carry to the world the good news, persuasively and consistently. It cannot do otherwise.

## **II**

### **The Church as an Evolving Entity**

The first years of the church saw the continuation of the early preoccupation with being simply a spiritual fellowship, whose common endowment was the conviction of having been "saved" through faith in Jesus Christ. There was a corresponding lack of concern for the affairs of "the world." Eventually, however, the first generation Christians all passed off the scene. Years went by and the "called communities" found themselves several generations away from the birth of the church, living for an increasing number of years among the opposing and contrasting ideologies of the Greek and Roman worlds. Unavoidably, the early and relatively simple patterns of life became manifestly unsatisfactory. Change and complexification were inevitable.

The problem of witnessing to the Christian faith grew into one not only of reporting a first-hand experience, but one of validating, of marshalling some evidence for Christian claims. Thus necessarily arose the concern to keep the witness true and to interpret it accurately within societies which had no first-hand experience and no religious heritage which would prepare them to receive it.

Also, inescapably, the isolated churches began to de-

velop more and more complicated patterns of internal regulation and of relation to one another.

As the expectation of an imminent second coming of Christ slowly receded and finally moved out of the center of thought and discussion, the church had to confront the problem of just how to be the organized voice and expression of the Christian faith in "the world" in which the first generation of Christians had little or no interest.

All of these and other concerns gave rise to an emerging complex of problems:

1. The nature of "the church" as the continuing body of Christ fulfilling his will in the world.
2. The content of "the true witness" and the authority by which this witness is to be determined.
3. The pastoral care and nurture of the Christian community and the means by which that care is to find valid expression as the ministry of Christ.
4. The criterion for the settling of differences which more and more arose among the many isolated congregations.

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (200-258) worked out the first systematic and detailed statement of a doctrine of the institutionalized church as an instrument of salvation, the centrality of the clerical hierarchy, the importance of the sacramental system, and the doctrine of good works.

The church at Rome grew rapidly and early became powerful and vigorous. Its strategic location at the capital of the world gave it an easy preeminence among the Christian congregations. The bishop of Rome early was referred to as the chief pastor. The validity of the claim that Peter went to Rome and was the first recognized leader of the Roman congregation is still widely debated. Nevertheless, the tradition that this occurred is an old one and gained wide credence throughout the various Christian congregations. References to the Roman bishop as head of the church are to be found at least as early as

the writings of Saint Clement in 95 or 96 A.D., of Saint Ignatius of Antioch about 107, Irenaeus in the late second and early third centuries, Tertullian writing about 220. By the early years of the third century there are clear references to "the pope" (Latin, Papa) of the church at Rome. Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine (272-337) and this, along with other developments, almost solidified the general acceptance of the preeminence of the Roman bishop.

No sooner had the institutional pattern of a catholic (universal) church been established than did differences of doctrine and polity develop into serious issues, with resulting numerous defections from the central Christian body. The so-called "Great Schism" of 1054 in which the churches of Asia Minor separated themselves from the Roman dominated congregations to become the Greek Orthodox Church had many causes. The most immediate issue was the aggressive pressing of the claim of the supremacy of the church at Rome over all other churches. Additionally, there were many other causes of cultural and political differences.

Defections for various reasons continued, with the next major split coming as the Protestant Reformation, actually extending through several centuries, but having its most intensive and dramatic moments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries under such men as Martin Luther and John Calvin. The story of the continuing and expanding dissection of the Christian body into smaller and smaller and more contentious pieces until at least 200 Protestant churches and sects could be numbered in America is well known and need not be developed here for our purposes.

In retrospect the major continuing issues which have contributed to change throughout the 1900 years of the church's history would appear to include the following:

1. Differences in basic theological matters.

- a. Early debates regarding the nature of God and Christ and the Holy Spirit.
  - b. The meaning of sonship, incarnation, and resurrection.
  - c. The means by which the grace of God is mediated to man and the importance of the church and the priesthood in that mediation.
  - d. The continuing concern about original sin, its meaning and content; about the problem of good works versus faith, about election versus free grace for all.
2. The necessity of internal organization, complexified by the persisting debates about forms of church government, the proper roles of the laity and the clergy respectively, the importance of ordination, the criteria for identifying those "called" to ordination.
  3. Problems associated with the dual necessity of being an institution in the world; thus appropriating the strength that a strong institution can give to an effective witness, while remaining close enough to first-hand religious experience to be both the prophetic voice of God and the instrument of reconciliation of God's love in action.
  4. The concern to communicate the gospel in relevant terms regarding the persistent problems of each generation.

Throughout its whole history the church has been and continues to be an evolving entity. The church in all of its twentieth century forms, ranging from the loosely related brotherhoods such as the Society of Friends to the intricately structured world girdling Roman Catholic Church, has moved a long distance away from the relatively simple pattern and concerns of the first century church. The problem of change and identity is one long recognized by the classical philosophers of the West. Nowhere is this problem more clearly illustrated than in the life of the Christian church which has undertaken to be changeless in its witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, while at the same time adapting itself

to the demands of the changing world and to various social and cultural patterns into which the Christian message has been carried.

### III

#### **The Contemporary Ecumenical Movement**

Whereas the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were characterized by division and redivision of the body of Christ into sects and denominations, the twentieth century has been a reversal of that trend. Church mergers now are increasing in frequency, and conversations go on almost perpetually in search of grounds on which still more denominations may come together into single bodies. At last sectarianism has been recognized as a contradiction and a sin within the life of the church.

In the United States the National Council of Churches is now several years old and slowly gains increased opportunity to act on behalf of the whole body of American Protestantism. A World Council of Churches also has been born in the twentieth century and gives promise of becoming an effective voice of the major portion of nonroman Christendom. None know how far the reapproachment between Rome, the East, and Western non-roman churches, stimulated by the World Council and the Ecumenical Council may go.

The nature of the task facing the church and the vast strength of the forces which oppose the church awakened concerned churchmen to their need for one another and to the real perniciousness of the sin of division. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, one of the great statesmen of the emerging ecumenical church, has ably described the conviction by which Christians now are motivated to seek a new unity in Christ:

The ecumenical movement does not owe its origin to a passion for unity alone. Its roots lie in a rediscovery of the nature and mission of the church of Christ. Nothing less than that could have created the movement; nothing less than that can keep it

going and growing. A theology of the ecumenical movement must, therefore, be concerned with the whole calling of the Church and seek to answer the question of what implications that calling has for the relationships which the churches should have with each other in the ecumenical movement and for the tasks which they should undertake together.

What is the whole calling of the Church? It is to fulfill the mission with which it has been entrusted by Christ. "As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (Jn. 17:18).<sup>8</sup>

Though it is easily and commonly assumed that the reestablishment of true Christian unity will issue eventually in a single monolithic church, it is by no means certain that this could or should happen. There are theological, sociological, and practical reasons why caution should be exercised regarding the movement toward the obliteration of all denominational lines.

By its very nature Protestantism can be expected always to be characterized by genuine theological disagreement. Even as salvation does not depend on good works, neither does it depend upon assent to an allegedly infallible theology. The free mind, responding to different personal experiences and different sets of circumstances within different times and cultures, will arrive at fundamentally different interpretations of the meaning of many essential elements of the Christian faith. These differences are not always expressions of "the pride of reason," nor do they develop out of any innate perversity. Rather, they are often the careful expression of honest convictions painfully arrived at, and their reality should not be denied. So long as such honest differences exist there will be need for likeminded persons to associate themselves together in the development of further theologies and practices coherent with these convictions.

There are also sociological and cultural foundations out

8. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *THE PRESSURE OF OUR COMMON CALLING*, 27-28. New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1959.

of which denominational differences emerge. Here, as in theological conviction, difference does not require qualitative judgment. To recognize that persons differ in their patterns of life and their practices is not to pass judgment upon these persons or these differences. So long as sociological and cultural differences are genuine there will be problems regarding the establishment and continuation of any single organized Christian body.

There are also practical reasons for moving with extreme care toward larger and larger ecclesiastical organizations. Even though merging and combining into larger and larger bodies will multiply resources available under single control, there is also the effect of increased depersonalization at a time when this already has become a problem of serious proportions. There must be serious consideration regarding the extent to which church bodies can expand in size without destroying an awareness of genuine personal responsibility in the action and life of the community. Again, there is the sheer problem of size itself. Beyond a certain size an institution begins to be cumbersome in its movements, resistant to change, and less sensitive to the needs of persons and major social concerns.

The essential intent as the church seeks with all deliberate dispatch to reestablish a genuine unity should be mutual respect, a readiness to join forces in every possible way, and to seek under the guidance of the Holy Spirit those institutional structures through which the body of Christ can best be made a tangible fact in the affairs of the world. There is no finer statement of the true nature of Christian unity than the well known passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthians which we have noted earlier in this chapter and which concludes thus:

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues.

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts.<sup>9</sup>

## **IV**

### **What Is the Church?**

In attempting to understand the true nature of the contemporary church one must neither ignore nor be bound by the history of the church. To ignore its history would be folly indeed. If somehow the church is an instrument of God in human affairs, its original nature must be understood and serious inquiry must be made regarding what of the original church is a timeless property of its nature. And if there is some timelessness to be discovered in the early church, it is important to know what nineteen centuries of evolution have done to the church.

Just as it would be folly to ignore the history of the church, so would it be defeating to be bound by that history. The present day confronts the church with new demands as well as with old demands in new garb. The church must seek to be faithful to that which is a property of its own nature while free to adapt itself as radically to the present as genuine fulfilment of its mission demands.

With these considerations in mind, I would define the church as follows: The church is the necessary community of those who have committed their lives to the will of God as understood in his revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. The essential nature of the church lies in its being a community of commitment, expressing its common life in corporate worship, in Christian nurture, and in cooperative Christian action. The church is called to be the beloved community through which personal and cultural reconciliation with God may be undertaken.

Organizational structure and assignment of responsi-

9. I Corinthians 12:27-31.



bility are necessary to any corporate undertaking. Liturgies and orders are important to meaningful worship. The perpetuation of faith-commitments from generation to generation requires the careful formulations of creeds and affirmations. An apologetic task sufficient to answer the legitimate questions raised by honest and critical minds in various communities and various eras must be carried forward. But all of these, while important, are as such expendable and should ever be open to total revision or discard. The timeless property of the church is a community of commitment to the will of God as revealed through Jesus Christ. How this community is to be organized, through what channels it is to operate, the issues to which the Christian witness must speak, the forms communication must take, the formulation of creeds which speak to the contemporary mind, and the nature of the apologetic task within any set of circumstances must never be confused with the church's essential nature. The task undertaken in the writing of this book is an exploration of how these flexible and expendable expressions of the church's life may be adapted to achieve relevance to contemporary life.

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## Problems of Relevance

IT IS in a world of revolution that the contemporary witness of the church must be made; a world shaken by *total* revolution, confused about truth and value, beset by anxieties. The Christian community itself has not escaped the confusion or the anxiety of the world in which it exists. Additionally, it is confronted with new problems and the most powerful challenge for the minds and commitments of men's hearts that it has ever faced.

There are at least three basic questions to be faced as the church seeks to understand its contemporary life and mission. The first of these is: What is the proper and demonstrable meaning of Christian unity? It can hardly be debated that in one sense or another the Christian community must be one. There is no other understanding by which we can fulfil the calling to be "the body of Christ." Neither can it be debated with any conviction that sectarianism or any form of divisiveness within the whole body of Christ is, to use terms currently employed, "a sin and a scandal." Yet, with all this being readily understood it is by no means clear what the nature of the unity of the Christian church in the contemporary scene can mean.

A second basic question: Is there an adequate rationale for the mission of the church in the contemporary world, especially as an agent of evangelism and conversion? I use the term "rationale" here to differentiate what I am meaning to suggest from a theology of the contemporary church. I have no great doubt that Christian theologians working within the framework of the commitments and

presuppositions of the Christian faith will be able to develop a theory for the Christian mission to the contemporary scene which is wholly consistent with the Christian tradition. The question I am suggesting here, however, is of a different nature. I am really asking the question, "Is there some point of reference to which appeal may be made and according to which the Christians claim on behalf of God and man may be seen to carry authority superior to that of any other claim upon man's loyalty—religious, political, or secular?" This is one of the questions that deeply troubles the contemporary college student as he studies anthropology, comparative religion, philosophy of religion and similar subjects. He discovers that within the frame of reference of any of the leading religions of the world there are adequate grounds for the justification of that faith. By their very nature it is necessary for most religions to claim superiority to other faiths and indeed at last sole validity among contending religious voices. Many religions are internally consistent. Thus the claim of the Christian church to be the witness to a unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ must be justified and supported on some ground other than the prior acceptance of the church's own presuppositions. Otherwise, this claim will not recommend itself to very many honest and critical minds. While we cannot deal adequately with the question in this book, we shall look at it again in Chapter Eight.

The third question is the most fundamental of all and the one to which we turn our attention for the major portion of this chapter: Can the church be *relevant* to contemporary life? This question points to a closely associated, almost identical one: Are we actually in or on the threshold of a post-Christian era? There is much to suggest that the church may be hard at work forging answers to questions which are not being asked.

The question of relevance is, I repeat, the most fundamental one to be dealt with. There will be little profit even in achieving Christian unity if it is unity in irrele-

vance. Similarly, little will have been gained if we find an adequate rationale for the church only to discover that the church in fact lives out its life in tragic irrelevance to the real issues of the day. This question needs to be faced with the most courageous and candid honesty.

## I

### Symptoms of Irrelevance

There are disturbing symptoms of irrelevance that must be looked at with complete candor. For one thing there is the practical irrelevance of much to which Christian people give theoretical allegiance. On a Saturday afternoon a few years ago I attended the Evensong Service in Westminster Abbey with a group of American students. This was a beautifully arranged and appropriate ritual complete with scriptural readings, liturgies chanted by the trained boys' choir, and all of the meaningful pomp and circumstances of the Established Church. Yet, without the tourists like ourselves, who attended only because we happened to be at the Abbey at that particular time, almost certainly the boys' choir would have outnumbered those who came off the streets of London for the express purpose of participating in this service of worship.

During that same summer we attended the famous Passion Play at Oberammergau, Germany. Whatever may be said of this production by the drama critics, it certainly is impressive in the number of persons who participate with better than average skill, the direction and management of the great numbers of people involved in the beautifully arranged tableaux, and the music composed particularly for the play. Impressive also is the fact that this small village has, with only a few unavoidable exceptions, kept the pledge made more than two hundred years ago by their fathers as an act of thanksgiving to present a dramatic reenactment of Passion Week once each decade. Yet the very setting in this beautiful and remote Bavarian village is itself illustrative of the

essential irrelevance of this whole performance to the real concerns of contemporary life. One has the distinct impression that the thousands who come to Oberammergau do not come on a spiritual pilgrimage, but come out of the curiosity of tourists wanting to "do" Europe.

On the continent of Europe the effect of the Protestant churches upon the culture appears to be more historic than contemporary. The record regarding understanding of and effective resistance to Nazism is not yet clear. Certainly the early impression on this side of the Atlantic that the Protestant churches willingly and quickly became pawns of the Hitler machine is by no means correct. The *Barmen Articles* (1934), the formation of the Emergency League of Pastors in response to a call from Karl Barth and Martin Niemöller, and the efforts of the Brotherhood Council of the Confessing Church with the cooperation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, are monumental evidences of resistance. Franklin H. Littell reports that the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich has undertaken an "interdisciplinary" study of the church struggle in Germany (1933-45), involving theologians, scientists, sociologists, and legal philosophers.<sup>1</sup> This will be an invaluable service both to Germany and to the Christian world generally, and should go far toward setting the record straight.

However heroic may have been the struggles of individual churchmen and congregations against Hitler, continental Protestantism had long since lost its prophetic

1. Franklin H. Littell, *THE GERMAN PHOENIX*. New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1960. Dr. Littell was chief Protestant advisor to the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany immediately after World War II and later senior representative of the Franz Lieber Foundation. He has thus been in position to write one of the most penetrating and thought-provoking analyses of the resistance of the German church to Hitler thus far produced. The historical account is particularly valuable, though the theoretical discussions reflect quite notably the author's theological bias.

voice and vision. The Lutheran Churches had for centuries been in tacit league with whatever temporal powers may be, so long as government left intrachurch affairs to the churches. It was by no means unpredictable that the Lutheran bishops proclaimed in October, 1934, that "We German Protestant Christians accept the saving of our nation by our leader Adolf Hitler as a gift from God's hand." The Calvinistic churches in Germany were in the active resistance to Hitler; yet from the example of John Calvin in Geneva onward, Calvinism in principle has always been prepared to accept an alliance, if not positive identity, with temporal powers. Beyond the church-state relationships was the progressive identification of continental "Christianity" with bourgeois culture. The church thus lost the ability to distinguish between a genuinely Christian social order and an amicable, comfortable paganism.

The Roman Catholic Church can hardly be charged with "irrelevance" to the issues of life in Europe, yet one might well wish for less relevance. The Catholic Church in the twentieth century has been notorious for its unholy political alliances with Franco in Spain and Mussolini in Italy, to mention only the more flagrant and dramatic examples. In Germany as early as March, 1933, the Roman Catholic political party, Zentrum, allied itself with Hitler and the program of National Socialism. As to participating in and giving positive leadership to the revolution of European life, this the Roman Catholic Church has not done. On the contrary, it has almost always been, if active at all, in league with the powers of reaction. The Catholic Church must share with the Protestants some serious responsibility for failure to understand the revolution that has operated at every level of European life.

In the sixties neither the Catholic nor the Protestant Churches are major forces in the determination of the culture of continental Europe. In France, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, and the Scandinavian countries, life moves

steadily toward post-Christian patterns. Some of the churches are official state-related institutions which require little active concern on the part of the laity. Some are independent of the state, but preoccupied with theological and liturgical purity, exhibiting little awareness of or concern for the arena of daily social and personal life. Some are in essence pietistic sects in which fervently sincere but largely ineffectual efforts are made to stem the tide of secularism through highly emotionalized religious services, biblical literalism, and rigorous avoidance of "worldliness" in behavior.

In Central Europe there may be a new and vital growth that will issue in a more vigorous and relevant church. Some, like Franklin H. Littell, believe the *Kirchentag* movement and similar developments in Germany have this meaning. Indeed, there are developments here worth watching, though it is too soon to evaluate them accurately.

Possibly the most dramatic irrelevance of all is to be seen in both the history and the contemporary existence of the Orthodox Church in Russia. Prior to the Revolution the Orthodox Church was one of the major land owners in Russia. It was, in the worst sense, an opiate of the people. It was in league with the decadent aristocracy which ruled Russia while offering religious solace to the masses who lived in grinding poverty, this despite the deep spiritual significance of its mass and its profound theological foundation.<sup>2</sup>

In America the Christian religion now enjoys the greatest approval and general acceptance it has ever known. Membership and attendance grew steadily for several years. Yet there is a revealing discontinuity between soaring church attendance and the impact of the church on pressing issues of the day. Some persons most active

2. The Russian Orthodox Church will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Ten.



in the churches recognize no contradiction in being at the same time members of the John Birch Society or the White Citizens' Councils. There is cause to fear that, even as the churches of nineteenth century continental Europe became identified with bourgeois culture, so are the churches in twentieth century America being drawn into enfeebling entanglements with the values of a new materialism. Many would make of the church a sanctifier of the social, economic, and ethnic status quo. In a highly commercialized society the church may be very useful as a sponsor of expedient altruism or as a bulwark of solid citizenship. But in such an order, where the accumulation and nurture of wealth is the fundamental, preoccupation, social tranquility and positive thinking are essential. Thus not only big business but even universities and churches accept the guidance and controls of professional public relations counselors in creating a public image that will win popular approval. And the voice of the prophet is heard no more in the land.

A second symptom of irrelevance of the church to contemporary life is the infrequency with which restless and creative minds turn to the church for serious guidance amidst the perplexities of this time. It is unfortunate that some of the most creative thought about the basic values of life goes on in environments very unchurchlike and under the guidance of persons who have no relationship to nor understanding of the church and its contributions to the searching human spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Another evidence of irrelevance is the extent to which the church has lost its power to communicate with "the secular world and the sinners." As noted before, more and more the church has tended to become the symbol of prosperous respectability, standing for all things good, challenging no one, and having less traffic with the spiritually, economically, and culturally impoverished per-

3. Cf., James Baldwin, *THE FIRE NEXT TIME*. New York: The Dial Press, 1963.

sons in our community and national life. It is disturbing to remember that the church at its inception was called to be a community of love which draws into its own fellowship the unlovely, the sinners, the negative and destructive elements within a community. In the summer of 1960 Professor J. L. Hromadka, dean of the Comenius Faculty of Prague University, was the preacher to seven hundred representatives of the World Student Christian Federation assembled from all over the world in Strasbourg, France. Professor Hromadka's sermon was a most provocative one. Without intending complete approval of everything that Dr. Hromadka said on that occasion, it is worth calling particular attention to one paragraph of the English resume which focused sharply upon the church's need to communicate with those who lie outside its fellowship:

There is one very serious question closely connected with the other one: are we at all in an inward disposition to make Jesus of Nazareth understandable to the world beyond our churches and any Christian tradition? I know what I speak about. Every day and night I have to ask myself in my own country whether or not I find vital, relevant, dynamic words to make the "pagans" understand what I mean by Jesus Christ and by the words Redeemer and redemption. I find myself very often in an agony of soul whenever I realize not the unbelief of the surrounding world, of our atheists or indifferent intellectuals, but whenever I sense my own incapacity to approach other people and to confront them, to challenge them by my testimony of Jesus. I have to question my own integrity of faith: do I really believe in him, not on the level of some intellectual formula, not even on the level of moral conventions of Christian civilization, but on the level of my own life in the deepest depths of my humanity or, as we say today, at the bottom of human existence? Do not take my words as mere oratory: take them as seriously as I myself test them in the moments of spiritual tension, the moments of the deepest inward struggle we have to undergo exactly in the days of the present human situation. Martin Luther started his Reformation realizing that we can be liberated from our unbelief, sin, and

curse when we find ourselves in the company of lost sheep and cursed sinners. And it is here that I wish to impress upon you the very meaning of the prophetic and apostolic message as I understand it: Jesus of Nazareth meets us not on the level of moral dignity, security, and personal achievements; he meets us not in the realm of our ecclesiastical self-righteousness. He meets us at the bottom of our human depravity, in the abyss of our hopelessness and forlornness. He meets us exactly there where we realize that we are absolutely one with all sinners, atheists, skeptics of the world.<sup>4</sup>

A fourth symptom of irrelevance is the growing disillusionment of many high-minded persons regarding both the ability and the concern of the church to give leadership to the causes to which the church is theoretically committed. There is a disturbingly large number of persons in education or politics or diplomacy or even the commercial world who with courage and sacrifice, invest themselves in the cause of human brotherhood, but who see no need nor relevance of the church as they know it. They are not against the church. It is simply that it never occurs to them that the church could or would be an effective ally in social or political or educational efforts to lift the level of human life.

A still further symptom is the growing list of irrelevant projects and activities in which churches or their agencies invest major time and effort. This is not hard to illustrate: The annual football dinner of the men's brotherhood at which the coach and the star quarterback are the honored guests; the youth organization which is theoretically built around the interests and concerns of teen-agers, but which succeeds in attracting only a handful away from the jukebox and the soda fountain on the corner; the women's church club that puts more women to work preparing the weekly luncheon than on any other phase of its supposed concerns; the Sunday morning sermon that consists of a loosely joined collection of "illustra-

4. Professor J. L. Hromadka, JESUS CHRIST THE REDEEMER.

tions" from THE READER'S DIGEST and 101 SERMONS IN STORIES. It is not that any of these and many other projects of which these are illustrative are evil or even uninteresting; it is only that they are irrelevant to the meaning and purpose of the church.

A sixth symptom of irrelevance is found in the contemporary effects of the deep dichotomy between "the spirit" and "the world" which has been an unfortunate part of much Christian theology. "The spirit" is thought of as a higher order of being, much closer to God than "earthly things." "The world" includes not only the physical order but man's sinful nature and is therefore inferior to spirit and prone to evil. This gradation into superior and inferior orders of being affects Christian understanding far more profoundly than appears on the surface.

One result is that in failing to recognize in the physical order the dependable goodness of God such theology contributes to the irrelevance of the church.

Like it or not, this is an age of science and technology of which the whole man, body and spirit, is a beneficiary. Cooperation with and utilization of physical forces can eliminate hunger and conquer ancient diseases. Whole nations can be freed from grinding poverty and the elemental struggle for existence. Human energies can be shifted to the quest for aesthetic and spiritual sensitivity, and the reverent utilization of physical media can tangibly aid in this quest. A theology adequate for contemporary life must take account of the fact that appropriation of natural resources to the strengthening of an economy and application of technological knowledge to the raising of the material standard of living may be the most profound expression of Christian stewardship possible.

We have been exploring symptoms of the irrelevance of the church to the twentieth century mind. Among these we have considered the practical irrelevance of the church as an institution, the infrequency with which creative minds seek the guidance of the church, the break-

down of communication with the "secular world," the disillusion of high-minded persons regarding the ability of the church to give leadership in the key issues of the time, the irrelevance of much to which churches devote major energy, and the unrealistic discontinuity between "the spirit" and "the world" from which much Christian theology (hence Christian presuppositions) still suffers. These have been illustrative only. The list could be extended, but without further usefulness to our present purpose.

## II

### **The Community of Love in a Depersonalized Culture**

In its mission to be the community of reconciling love the contemporary church is involved in a complex and deep-reaching dilemma. In order to understand this condition fully it is necessary to understand the meaning of Christian love and the conditions which must be met if the love of this community is to do its reconciling work.

The term love is employed to symbolize far too many attitudes and emotions. That kind of love which for one reason or another gets most attention in the present day is romantic love. This type of love shares with all other types the characteristic of concern for the creation, preservation, and enhancement of the values and the life of another person. Romantic love differs from other types in that it properly finds one of its principal expressions through sex attraction and response.

As we turn to love as the creative nucleus of the Christian community we find at least two levels of love. The first of these is that of a general attitude, an essentially *good will* toward other persons, even those whose ways one does not like, or toward one's enemies. Love as general good will is not superficial nor weak. It is fundamentally a willingness to treat all other persons as ends in themselves, as possessing the dignity of Children of God. It is that fundamental mind-set according to which

an individual or a community is prepared to return good for evil in all circumstances where good may be accepted and permitted to have its healing and reconciling effect. In many situations this is all that is possible for a Christian community. Relationships are either remote or persons are so alienated toward one another, that nothing more than an attitude, a willingness to act in love, is possible.

The essential work of the Christian community, in which persons are reconciled to one another and through the impact of love are reconciled to God, is one which requires direct personal interrelationships. Love can work only as persons can be brought into the life of the Christian community and their defenses relaxed sufficiently that they are willing to open their own lives to the impact and ministration of the community. The love of the Christian community is of necessity an intimate relationship. Yet it is distinct from romantic love because the element of eros is not properly a part of it. The classical Christian definition of love remains the thirteenth chapter of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.

One of the best contemporary statements of the nature of love operating within the personality, and essentially a contemporary analysis of the love which Paul described poetically, emerges from the work of Erich Fromm, a psychologist. Fromm describes personality in terms of what he calls "orientations." The typical personality, he says, has two major orientations, the non-productive and the productive. The non-productive orientation has four characteristics—receptivity, exploitation, hoarding, marketing. Each of these he describes in some detail. The fundamental characteristic of the productive orientation is what Fromm calls "productive love." His discussion of this orientation is very instructive for our purposes:

Although the objects of love differ and consequently the intensity and quality of love itself differ, certain basic elements may be said to be characteristic of all forms of productive love. These are care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge . . . To

love a person productively implies to care and to feel responsible for his life, not only for his physical existence but for the growth and development of all his human powers. To love productively is incompatible with being passive, with being an onlooker at the loved person's life; it implies labor and care and the responsibility for his growth. . . . Care and responsibility are constituent elements of love, but without respect for and knowledge of the beloved person, love deteriorates into domination and possessiveness. Respect is not fear and awe; it denotes, in accordance with the root of the word (*respicere*—to look at), the ability to see a person as he is, to be aware of his individuality and uniqueness. To respect a person is not possible without knowing him; care and responsibility would be blind if they were not guided by knowledge of the person's individuality.<sup>5</sup>

Fromm helpfully points out also that every human personality is a blend of the non-productive orientations and the productive orientation of love. Such factors as receptivity, exploitation, hoarding, and marketing, have proper functions to play in the adjustment of the individual. The very names of these, even in the absence of some of Fromm's clarifying descriptions, make it clear that they are dangerous to the personality because the line between constructive and destructive degrees of each of these is a very thin one and often indistinguishable. Nevertheless, every personality is of necessity a blend of the non-productive and the productive orientation. Both for Fromm and for the traditional Christian point of view the mentally well personality is the one in which the orientation of productive love becomes the dominant and controlling characteristic of the personality.<sup>6</sup>

5. Erich Fromm, *MAN FOR HIMSELF*, 98-101. New York: Rinehart and Co., Inc., 1947.

6. Fromm has not attempted to analyze and describe Christian love. In fact, his own philosophic presuppositions are much more humanistic than Christian. Nevertheless, the love which he, working as a psychologist, has described is identical with the love the Christian sees as necessary but possible only as God first loves man.

This necessity of achieving, not perfect productivity but a blend between non-productive and productive orientations, constitutes a built-in difficulty for the success of the Christian community. This community undertakes rightly to be an instrument in the development of persons whose dominant quality is creative love. Because of the necessary presence of the non-productive elements the perfect ideal of creative love can never be achieved. At best, therefore, the Christian community struggles to be born and to mature among beings who by their very nature must fall short of the perfect ideal of love.

In the contemporary scene this "Built-in difficulty" is greatly augmented by the progressive depersonalization of life. The fact and the symbols of depersonalization are all about us:

The depersonalization of sheer numbers in a mass society.

The depersonalizing influences of urban life, ironically symbolized in the first hour of life when the new-born baby is finger printed, foot printed, and given a plastic number for identification among the dozens of temporary neighbors in the nursery.

The effects of working daily with people we never really know, of attending separate schools, of belonging to different clubs.

The depersonalization of mass production and mass communication.

The depersonalization, even, of the former means of interpersonal communication, recreation, and service; e.g., instead of learning to play musical instruments we buy stereophonic record players, instead of learning to bake we buy boxed cakes, instead of learning to sew we buy mass-produced clothes, instead of writing thoughtful notes to our friends at Christmas we buy beautifully printed cards with even our names done on a printing press. (We have now carried this to the



point where many would hesitate to write personal notes even if they wished, lest their friends interpret this as a means of economizing on Christmas remembrances!).

The depersonalization of vocational and professional life, to the extent that even a hospital patient and his surgeon may never meet until that tense moment in the operating theater before the ether mask descends. The depersonalization of a culture based on material values.

The depersonalization of remote control warfare, so that even our enemies are no longer persons to be hated and injured, but machines and gadgets to be thwarted and checkmated.

Even the processes of education which once were thought to be irrevocably intimate and personal have now been invaded by depersonalizing influences in the form of closed circuit television and mechanical teachers which give lectures, ask questions and correct papers, all on a completely objective and impersonal basis!

In a culture so completely depersonalized and moving so rapidly toward increased depersonalization, how is the Christian community of love to be created? To this there is no simple and clear answer at the moment. The dilemma is a real one. The church by its nature must strive to be the community of reconciling love, yet so often the urban church has difficulty in being little more than an assembly of people who supposedly hold certain general theistic beliefs and moral convictions in common. As a minimum there must be a radical rethinking of what the church is and how it is to operate.

To make matters even more difficult there is the danger of serious superficiality in contemporary approaches to what is known as "group dynamics." What often passes for group dynamics would be more honestly called "how to get people to do what you want them

to while thinking they are exercising some creative free choice." Not only is this approach often an essentially dishonest means of invading the free decision of the other person; it also suffers from the danger of mistaking frequent and enthusiastic responses to trivial and surface matters for genuine interpersonal communication. The group dynamics movement, far from being any answer to the church's need for the re-establishment of genuine interpersonal relationships, may be either diversionary or counterfeit.

The possibility of modernization and reinstatement of the old Methodist class meeting is worth serious exploration. It will be recalled that the class meeting was a frequent gathering of a small number of persons, seldom more than a dozen, who knew one another intimately in the day-by-day commerce of vocational, family, and recreational life. Concern for and awareness of the presence of God was made a central part of the class meeting, and genuine spontaneous prayer, both silent and vocal, consumed an important part of the time in which the class was together. The remainder of the time was given over to an open, free, and solicitous discussion among the members of the problems that lay most heavily upon their hearts. There was usually little sham or artificiality because each knew all so well. At best, it was a loving relationship in which there was little evasion or defensiveness. Sometimes attention was focused upon a joyous report of a recent answer to prayer or the effect of the presence of God in one's life. A modern adaptation of the class meeting could just as well give important time to study and discussion of matters of contemporary concern, political, economic, social, or ecclesiastical.

The large urban church may have more members than whole districts of thirty or forty churches of a hundred years ago. It may be time to take cognizance of the resurgent lay movements in Germany and elsewhere on the European continent and recognize the importance of increased responsibility for laymen in ministering to the

Christian community. The ministerial staff of many urban churches finds it impossible to develop genuine direct pastoral care of all the members of that church because sheer numbers and the depersonalizing factors described above prevent a small professional staff from achieving the requisite interpersonal relationships. A new recognition of the need for and the careful work of the lay preacher within the congregation of the urban church must become a matter of extensive concern. These and other means of overcoming the depersonalization of the contemporary church and establishing the conditions in which the reconciling impact of love can be felt through small intimate loving fellowships is a matter whose urgency cannot be overemphasized and which should no longer be neglected.

### III

#### **The Prophetic Voice and the Institutionalized Church**

There is a further dilemma with which the contemporary church must deal. This is the problem of keeping a prophetic vision and proclamation alive and unfettered within the church as an institution.

Prophecy, as used here, is the proclamation of the will of God for the major concerns of a time insofar as his will can be understood through seeking devotedly and with openness of heart and mind. A major element in the heritage of the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition and hence the Christian church is that of prophecy. The prophetic voice is no less needed in modern life than in earlier times.

Prophecy by its very nature has a spontaneity about it. It oscillates between brilliant insight and almost naive error. It resists system, even to the point of anarchy. It is often most effective when forced to live in rags and to proclaim an unpopular and heretical judgment upon the established order. At its best it is one of the purest forms of reporting upon an immediate awareness of the will

of God. Genuine divine inspiration of all practical efforts of the Christian community to serve God in its age depend upon the devoted insight and sacrificial service of its few prophets.

Yet the church, if it takes seriously the task of being an instrument of the will of God in the twentieth century, must be a strong complex of institutions. A group of individuals, however numerous or consecrated, acting singly or in small loosely organized groups, can hope to make little real impact in the present scene. Ours is a time of power structures; of unions; corporations; nations; international economic, political, and military, organizations; conferences and associations. Each of these employs the means of mass communication and undertakes to influence legislation, public opinion, business decisions, effecting the economy and having ramifications for almost the total lives of masses of people. It is within this highly organized pattern of power relationships that the twentieth century church must operate.

The Good Samaritan on the road to Jericho or Paul traveling over the known world proclaiming the gospel demonstrate the principles of Christian love and responsibility. But their individual good acts could be nothing more than isolated events in our world. Their impact upon the forces that shape and often determine men's lives would be negligible.

To be truly the community of reconciling love today the church must express itself in educational institutions, social agencies, personnel selection and placement bureaus, in thousands of centers for rehabilitation, healing in hospitals and homes, in studies and consultative services for its representatives and administrators, in many and varied types of journals and books and publishing concerns, in conferences of many types, and in an almost unlimited number and variety of patterns and structures which are institutions or associations of institutions operating cooperatively. All of this requires major financial resources and skill in the investment and handling of

these resources. The church if it is truly to accomplish its mission in the twentieth century must be a powerful, secure, well financed, and ably administered institution operating within a vast power structure.

Institutions by their very nature are intermeshed with the social, political, and economic order within which they exist. There is no other way that the institution can be built and maintained. There is no possibility of the institution having decisive effects at strategic moments except that it maintain effective working relationships with many other institutions and associations of an essentially secular nature. Through the normal development of this necessary interrelationship within the pattern of a highly organized society the church becomes deeply identified with the status quo. It is now difficult if not impossible for the church to be "in the world but not of the world."<sup>7</sup>

Understandably, persons with significant resources to invest in even good causes tend to be conservative. There is nothing wrong with conservatism as such; indeed there is much right about it. Only those persons who have no responsibility can ignore completely the consequences of their acts for the existing order. Only the person who bears no responsibility for the handling and investment of the funds of other persons or himself

7. Some sensing the dilemma of the prophetic voice within the institutionalized church and sensitive to the negative effects of institutionalism have surrendered to despair and have called for dismantling the institution; *cf.*, Peter Berger, *THE NOISE OF SOLEMN ASSEMBLIES*, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1961. But this is a naive reaction which overlooks entirely the fact that any movement which persists beyond first-generation inspiration must become institutionalized. For a perceptive documentation of the necessity of bureaucracy, hence of institutionalism, *cf.*, Max Webber, "Bureaucracy." H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *FROM MAX WEBBER: ESSAYS IN SOCIOLOGY*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958. The dilemma must be faced head on, and ways sought whereby the church may be an institution which nourishes, hears, and respects its prophets.



can be completely radical economically. Only he who has no constitutional responsibility for an existing social order can be completely radical politically. Only he who has no children can be unconcerned about the morals and behavior of the younger generations. Concern to deal responsibly with values entrusted to our care will, by a necessary logic, change us from irresponsible radicals to conservatives in those areas where our responsibilities are most important to us. Understandably, then, men who make far-reaching financial and business decisions and who accumulate significant fortunes of their own are almost without exception and quite properly conservative in financial affairs.

Difficulty arises because the line between responsible conservatism and fearful reaction against even improvement is often indistinguishable. Conservatism easily gets to be a personality pattern and an automatic reaction to every new idea or every challenge to the status quo even when the status quo deeply needs to be challenged. This is why it has often been the good people, the solid, devoted, religious persons of an era who have been most deeply disturbed by and most bitter in their opposition to the prophets who arise within their religious tradition. It is no new idea of course, that it was the good and devoted leaders among the Jewish community who reacted with greatest indignation to the teachings of Jesus. The Pharisees were not villains. They were not traitors to their Judaistic heritage. They were the solid responsible citizens of their time, but tragically, it was they who were more responsible than any other one group for the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus. The crucifixion of Jesus was almost directly an act of institutionalized religion. This in principle is ever the hazard that the church faces as it moves toward institutionalized status.

Beyond the danger of inability to distinguish between responsible conservatism and fearful reactionism is the fact that there are always numerous persons quite ready

to use the church to justify and support their own vested interests. Too often within the very leadership of the Christian community reaction and deliberate chicanery operate to thwart the essential mission of the church to the world.

For all of these and other reasons the institutionalized church may not listen with either acceptance or even patience to the prophetic voice, yet when that voice is stilled the church cannot long continue as the instrument of God in human affairs.

Both the prophetic voice and the institutionalized structure of the church are essential in our time. The problem is to develop a most unusual kind of institution which encourages, protects, and heeds its prophets. Such institutions are not nonexistent. Educational institutions at their best perhaps exemplify this ideal more adequately than any other kind of institution outside the church itself. A great university is dedicated not only to the perpetuation of the intellectual, scientific, and cultural heritage of the past, but to the maintenance of a free community in which the creative mind may work unfettered and pursue new insight even to the point of sharp criticism of the heritage which the university has perpetuated. Sometimes corporations succeed also in preserving the essential nature of the product they have to offer while at the same time making room in their ranks for creative minds that may improve upon manufacturing or merchandising methods or who may see economic trends that would call for the radical realignment of the nature and function of the company.

If such relationship between stability and the creative mind can be achieved in the educational and the commercial worlds even imperfectly, certainly it can be achieved in the life and function of the modern Christian church. What most deeply is needed is awareness that the problem exists, openness to the will of God to be led by him, and depth of dedication to employ all of the insights and strengths and resourcefulness of the



institutionalized church in the reconciling task to which that church is eternally called.

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## Issues to Which the Church Must Speak

BAUDELAIRE'S PROSE POEM is a classic expression of the human desire to shield oneself from the stern demands of harsh reality:

Be always drunken. Nothing else matters: that is the only question. If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to earth, be drunken continually.

Drunken with what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will. But be drunken.

And if sometimes, on the stairs of a palace, or on the green side of a ditch, or in the dreary solitude of your own room, you should awaken and the drunkness be half or wholly slipped away from you, ask of the wind, or of the wave, or of the star, or of the bird, or of the clock, of whatever flies, or sighs, or rocks, or sings, or speaks, ask what hour it is; and the wind, wave, star, bird, clock, will answer you: "It is the hour to be drunken! Be drunken, if you would not be martyred slaves of Time: be drunken continually! With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will."<sup>1</sup>

The last half of the twentieth century is not a time when intelligent persons can be comfortable or complacent except they be drunken. "The horrible burden of Time" weighs heavily in our day, and there are many who seek refuge in wish-worlds of wine, or of art, or of virtue, or of religion, or of some other creation of

1. Charles Baudelaire, "Poems in Prose," translated by Symons.



their minds or hands. There are many who would make of the church a sanctuary of protection against the harsh realities of a world in revolution. Here they would be drunken with the psychological security that religious rituals can create so effectively. Here they seek reassurance that the old order still stands; here they hope to find religious sanction for a way of life which the times are shaking apart; here they want to find their way again into familiar and simple and undemanding pathways to virtue.

But in this time of catastrophic change God is calling the church out of its sanctuary into the world where some men suffer and die to bring into being a new dimension of human freedom, and where others fight with entrenched bitterness against all enlightenment. The church, if it is not to lose its life in this time of revolution, must reject the pathetic hope that it will be an instrument of escape from the real world. God calls the church to be relevant, and this is a sobering, exacting summons.

The calling of the church is essentially what it has always been: To proclaim and demonstrate that God has acted in Christ and acts today to reconcile man unto God and thus to bring man into his rightful heritage as a son of God. While in its content this witness remains what it has always been, the human problems within which the witness must be made are greatly changed. Some of the issues of contemporary life are quite new, and many which are old are cast in new and complex conditions.

Some are theoretical, having to do with the philosophy or theology by which men live. Some are "practical," or procedural, these calling for decisive action regarding the social order, the polity, and the economy.

## I

### Philosophical—Theological Issues

Once Alfred North Whitehead said there is nothing

more practical than a good theory. Similarly, there are often no more crucial issues to be confronted than theoretical issues. This is particularly true when, as in the present, ultimate questions of meaning and value are of necessity undergoing searching re-examination.

One of the major creative forces and sources of nourishment for Western culture has been its Judaeo-Christian religious heritage. Sometimes that heritage has been distorted even by its proponents so that its impact upon the common life has in essence been antichristian. Yet the Judaeo-Christian religious heritage has provided both the rationale and the motivation to work for an order in which the human person is respected as a child of God and in which governments and economies and the details of culture are finally to be measured against their effects upon persons. There are Christian worldviews. The loud contemporary denials of this fact reveal their own superficiality and call for no major counter-argument. Christian worldviews have deeply marked our basic presuppositions about man and God and the meaning of life and have been important elements in the rich subsoil nourishing the best within Western culture. This has been nonetheless true when the active proponents of that best have thought of themselves as wholly "secular" and have functioned outside the church.

Periodically rival worldviews have arisen to challenge all Christian interpretations of life. When these rivals have been strongly supported they have left their marks upon Christian understanding. The foundations of Western culture reflect an ongoing interaction between the Christian faith and other worldviews. Altered through the interacting process, the Christian faith has nonetheless succeeded in giving form and content to much that is basic within this culture.

During the twentieth century a new major challenge to all Christian interpretations of life has emerged and threatens not merely to alter but to supplant them. This rival is materialism, expressing itself at every level of life.



Unless the church can recover relevance, one or another form of materialism may determine for five hundred or a thousand years the presuppositions within which personal and corporate life will take form. We turn now to a consideration of this challenge.

#### *A. The Challenge of Materialism: Dialectical Materialism*

In using the term, dialectical materialism, I am not thinking so much of a finely spun philosophical theory as I am of a practical philosophy by which men at all levels of life may very well come to live. The dialectic as discussed by Hegel, Marx and others is a description of change through struggle and synthesis. The term materialism indicates that the basic assumptions concerning the nature of reality and the ultimate nature of values is materialistic. Physical health, physical comfort, technological efficiency, industrial productivity, control and distribution of wealth—these are the fundamental values because they are the tangible manifestations of that which is real and worth achievement.

Within a materialistic worldview man himself is basically an organism. His physical needs are paramount. The health, comfort, appetites, and fulfilment of the body are the essentials to which man must give first attention. The spirit of man need not be denied, so long as it is recognized simply as one of the refined levels to which an organism may develop. Spirit is not something other than the body, but spirit is one of the expressions of the human organism with its intricate and highly complicated central nervous system. Because man is basically an organism and because his values are fundamentally material values all human behavior is to be understood as interaction between organisms. Pursued further, this point of view leads to an economic interpretation of history. Questions of ethics are determined by the material values of the period and the personal and social practices which best achieve and preserve these values. Religion, politics, art—all areas of human life are to be

understood in terms of production, conservation, distribution, and appropriation of material things.

It is not my expectation that a dialectical materialism will become the basic worldview through some wide and effective propagation of its philosophy. Rather, it will come about, if at all, through the day-by-day attempt to adjust life to the realities amidst which men live, affected as they are by the values which are recognized as ultimate. Philosophical and even pseudo-theological foundations for a materialism which has become factual can be developed later as support in depth.

In vast areas of the world the collectivist society fashioned after the pattern of Soviet economy and polity is rapidly winning the allegiance of millions of people. Since World War II uncounted millions have adopted a materialistic collectivism as the basic doctrine of their lives and pattern of the social order.

One needs only to spend some time in a city such as Moscow to feel the extent to which devotion to materialistic collectivism can become a religion. In Moscow this devotion perhaps is most dramatically symbolized by thousands of persons waiting hours daily to view briefly the preserved body of the saint of the soviet order, Lenin. The lines move in silence and with the stately pace of a funeral procession from the time the tomb opens in the morning until it closes in the evening. Whole schoolrooms of children bearing wreaths pass along in this solemn procession. To watch the faces of these people is soon to realize that there is more here than mere curiosity. The corpse they will view is literally the tangible remains of the saint of a whole new pattern of life which is not only an economy and polity but an intended new religion as well.

Such an appeal as this is readily possible among a people who for centuries have lived in grinding poverty and who now have seen within two generations an apparently more equitable distribution of available resources of life. Those Russians to whom communism appeals as



a religion probably compare their lot with that of their grandfathers under the tzars, and while their political liberty may not have greatly increased during that period they do find themselves better clothed, better fed, with steady jobs, and with free education for their children. This to them is tangible improvement. This is a materialistic salvation. It is not easy for them to understand what alleged advantages they are missing by their inattention to a church which promises a future heaven, but in the here and now was one of the exploiters of the people and the spiritual bulwark of the small aristocracy in whose hands the power and the wealth resided.

What is true in Russia is true in vast portions of Asia and perhaps of Africa and Latin America. Communism has dramatically attacked poverty, disease, and ignorance directly. To backward people this is tangible evidence of the workability of this approach to life and it is readily understandable why millions are adopting such a point of view. The spread of communism has not been through scholarly debate of the issues. The power of its thrust has been partially due to unbelievably brazen machiavellianism in politics. But its power has also been partially attributable to its ability to give the impression, accurately or not, that it applies technology to the tangible physical needs the common man feels daily.

In America the real threat of dialectical materialism does not lie in any direct attack, either in cold war or hot war, by the Communist nations. American standards of living have far outstripped those of the Communist countries, and despite a creeping irresponsibility regarding democratic privileges Americans do yet on occasion respond with devotion to the liberty won in the American Revolution. The real and present danger is a home-grown practical materialism. In America we continue to regard ourselves as Christians and we use the terms peculiar to our Christian heritage. Our churches are highly respected institutions and to be a member of a church is often looked upon as a prerequisite to good citizenship.

Yet more and more our basic values are material values. Our vocations are largely chosen by matching our training and abilities with jobs that bring us the highest possible salary. We measure success by the cost of a man's home and its location, the style and model of his car, the cut of his clothing, the exclusiveness of the schools his children attend, the clubs he can afford to belong to, the furs his wife can wear, the lavishness with which they entertain their friends, and the place and prestige in the business world one is able through skillful manipulation of one's career to achieve. More and more we equate material and commercial success with the good life. More and more our interpretation of Christianity becomes a rationalization for our comfortable commercial lives. Though we are careful to identify ourselves as Christians we are less and less familiar with such terms as compassion, sacrifice, suffering, poverty, obedience, dedication. Yet it is in such terms that we must understand a religion that grew up around a man who owned nothing, who had no place or prestige, who was a failure by the standards of American commercial success, and who finally sacrificed his life in an apparently hopeless cause while yet in his early thirties.

While this creeping materialism is not Soviet sponsored it is in many ways more "dialectical" than the Soviet brand of materialism. Our devotion to commercial values is the antithesis opposing the Christian foundations of culture. The dialectical struggle between practical materialism and Christian conviction is already far advanced. The outline of the synthesis may even now be discernible: A refined and sophisticated culture, founded on the comfort and efficiency of technological accomplishment, overlaid with a veneer that has the look and feel of Christianity. Such a prospect is frightening not so much because it is post-Christian, as because it has the appearance of Christianity while having lost utterly the knowledge of the good news that man may be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.



## B. *The Challenge of Materialism: Naturalistic Theism*

Naturalistic theism is a philosophical interpretation of the universe and of human life, and has no historic nor direct connection with dialectical materialism, either practical or philosophical. Proponents of naturalistic theism are not as such discussing political or economic theories, and are no more favorably predisposed to any Soviet expression of dialectical materialism than are other citizens of the West. Nevertheless, naturalistic theism is a much more sophisticated philosophical materialism than is Marxism, and may very well provide pseudo-theological foundations of practical materialism. Among contemporary intellectuals this worldview has many able and conscientious proponents who are convinced that man's knowledge has developed to the point where a whole new philosophy and ultimately a whole new religion must emerge. The fundamental difference between naturalistic theism and Christian interpretations of life is in the understanding of the nature of the creative force responsible for our universe and the values we know.

For the Christian the ultimate meaning of life, the creator, and sustainer of values, is a personal God. The term personal indicates a being possessing certain characteristics of personality. Christians may debate among themselves whether the term personality properly describes God or whether he is super-personal. But the fact remains that the Christian tradition is one which presupposes the reality of a God who thinks and wills and plans and creates and loves and disciplines and participates as a conscious being in the universe as a whole and in human history.

For naturalistic theism the Christian God is replaced by a vast interplay of impersonal processes. Within this point of view it is held to be no longer necessary to "personalize" the forces responsible for man's life and his values. Belief in a personal god at a more primitive stage in the development of man's knowledge was quite understand-

able. Today, however, man knows that he deals with vast interrelated forces, some of which are helpful to him and some of which are harmful. Informed man recognizes this fact by approaching all of his problems through scientific study in an attempt to adapt himself and his resources to the most effective cooperation with the forces which he cannot control.

Within this point of view God becomes a name for those processes which create and sustain human values. Prayer is a process of self-analysis, of the psychological mobilization of one's resources, and of establishing a willingness to be cooperative with the forces which cannot be controlled. Within naturalistic theism man is his own greatest value because it is only in human personality that value is to be found. Man's values have no significance beyond the meaning he gives to them within his own life and within his own history. The universe itself is oblivious, not only to man's values, but to his very existence.

The human spirit here is not denied. Neither are material values prior to values of the spirit. Religious devotion, artistic creativity, sensitivity to beauty, compassion, personal devotion to what is believed to matter most, are all recognized as among the higher expressions of human personality. Within this view, too, however, man is basically an organism, because man in his nature is continuous with the natural universe. This basic reality which is the universe is best described through the natural and biological sciences. Human birth, life, and death are as much a part of the natural processes as the dropping of an acorn, the growth to maturity of an oak tree, and at last its fall before a storm. Indeed, the whole story of man and the whole of human history are simply part of the universe of process and law.

The interpretations which man gives to his history and the values which he associates with it, the causes for which he lives and dies, are important to him and have meaning to him. But these meanings are limited to man.



These meanings have no status in a universe of impersonal processes. Finally, the individual man and ultimately the whole of human history will have run their courses and will have ceased to be, and the universe will be unmindful that man ever was born, that he ever lived, or that he has now forever gone. Thus one of the fundamental human problems is that of gaining maturity to face the fact that man does not live forever, that the only real value is to be achieved here and now, and that therefore man is obligated to treat his fellow-man with the greatest reverence. It is a mark of the mature man to accept a limited life instead of an eternal life and to recognize that, after all, value is not to be measured by its duration but by its intensity. To live meaningfully, to find integrity in personality, to give oneself to that which is seen to be true or good or beautiful and to accept death as final is to be realistic and to be released both from fantasy and an essential selfishness.

Dialectical materialism and naturalistic theism, whether in alliance or not, are essentially irreconcilable with the Christian faith, except as that faith is distorted. Taken together they provide the foundation for a serious challenge to all Christian understandings of man and his values.

## II

### **Rival World Views and the Problem of Relevance**

In the face of this challenge the fundamental problem the church has to face is that of relevance.

Dialectical materialism, whether that sponsored by the Soviet Union in the economically backward areas of the world or the American home grown brand of commercial, technological materialism, challenges the Christian faith in terms of its relevance to human need and the intelligent use of material resources. A brand of Christianity that draws the sharp dichotomy between spirit as good and matter as evil will not serve either the convictions or the needs of the present day; neither

will a Christianity which becomes party to the continued exploitation and deprivation of whole nations and races of people. Individual altruistic impulse, while indispensable, is by no means adequate to make the church relevant to the material needs of our time and to the proper production and distribution of the resources of living. The voice of the church must be heard as a united and prophetic voice proclaiming the obligation of cultures to be their brothers' keepers. The church was once the champion of the economically underprivileged; it must become so again. Churchmen must join the search for the means not only to supply the basic needs of life, but also for means whereby these products may be rapidly and efficiently distributed to all areas of the world where there is hunger or suffering or any kind of human want. An adequate twentieth century theology will understand technological and scientific skills as man's successful effort to cooperate with God in appropriating the physical order to the needs of persons everywhere.

Naturalistic theism challenges the Christian faith in terms of its philosophical relevance to an age in which scientific knowledge has grown almost immeasurably and in which technological achievement has been almost unbelievable. If the Christian belief in a conscious God who creates and plans and loves is philosophically and theologically superior to the naturalistic account in terms of impersonal processes, that superiority must be demonstrated. The tragic retreat from rationality which has characterized much twentieth century Christian theology must be reversed. Yet, the Christian faith has always asserted that man's need for the God of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is more than philosophical. Man needs to be saved. The relevance to modern man of this claim also must be demonstrated.

The challenge to the relevance of the Christian church is both a theoretical and a practical challenge. Never has any challenge to the church been more powerful, more deeply entrenched, or more threatening. The ques-



tion is whether Christian faith can be shown to be not merely a revered and respected tradition but the most adequate interpretation of contemporary life and the most wholly effective fundamental commitment according to which man may bring himself and his whole society into adjustment to the realities of life. Unless it be so, the Christian faith must pass and be supplanted by another body of convictions and assumptions which to the mind of contemporary man provides a more adequate foundation for the building of life in the twentieth century.

### III

#### Practical Issues

Activism that is not grounded in sound philosophical and theological convictions easily degenerates into sentimentality and loses all sense of direction and significance. Yet nothing is more impotent, more irrelevant, than philosophical and theological systems which never find tangible fulfilment and application in the practical issues of life. There are burning issues in our time to which the church must make a Christian witness in practical terms which demonstrate the relevance of the Faith to the world as it is.

We turn now to a consideration of some of these issues.

*Human Rights.* The struggle for freedom of the human person under God is as old as human history and continues today. The discussion of a Christian philosophy of history in Chapter Four interpreted the fundamental meaning of history as a thrust for freedom. The Christian understanding of man has undergirded this struggle more solidly than has any other body of convictions. The church at its best has been on the side of human rights, though its record has not been without blemish.

In the present day the effort to gain and maintain human freedom is expanding both geographically and in terms of the quality of life. The thrust for freedom is no longer limited to Western cultures but now includes

all men everywhere. And the struggle is not merely for political freedom, but includes freedom of thought and conscience, of movement, of religion, of work and economic opportunity, from interference with privacy, and from discrimination. The struggle is expanding to include the right to work, security, adequate standards of living, health, education, and cultural enrichment.

The National Council of Churches, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, most of the major Protestant denominations, and the Roman Catholic Church have worked for several years to formulate and articulate official statements of Christian bases for human rights. These statements are translated into acts of Christian statesmanship on many fronts. Individual Christians and local congregations should familiarize themselves with these developments, and in some cases reexamine their own presuppositions and actions (or inaction) in light of them.

*Economic Life.* Among the practical problems with which any culture must deal successfully none is more important than the manufacture, distribution, and use of material things. Not only physical health and well-being but education, artistic appreciation and creativity, and spiritual growth as well may be facilitated or limited by the economic order.

The conditions of contemporary life which have brought new complexity to many persistent human problems are both cause and effect of our amazingly complicated modern economy. No aspect of present economic life is wholly good and there is little that is totally bad. The industrial revolution opened the way to all the benefits that are possible when modern technology is focused upon the problems of better housing, feeding, clothing and generally improved standards of living for masses of people. It created means of transportation and communication so that the stagnation and ignorance of isolation could be overcome. Buttressed by the development of a capitalist economy, it made possible the advantages



of urban living, even for residents of small communities and formerly remote rural areas. Standards of living and financial security for the masses of laboring people have never in any previous culture approached what is now a fact within the American economy.

Yet these same economic forces have created vast slum areas and polluted the very air city dwellers breathe. Paradoxically, workers have simultaneously been made more secure but less independent than ever before. The conditions of life which make possible the benefits of mass production have monotonized life and have closed men's eyes to the beauties of earth and sea and sky. Children have been forced to play in streets, often unchaperoned and susceptible to influence by the worst elements that flourish in a modern city. Vast fortunes have been created and with them vast power has come to those who hold them. Even the church has sometimes become so identified with the power structure created by our capitalistic economy that it has lost all capacity to be either a prophetic voice or a genuinely reconciling community. Worst of all, the very conditions that have made us better fed, better housed, more healthy, and have brought to us the comforts of reasonable material prosperity have turned us into a culture whose highest values and ultimate devotions are economically determined.

The difficult problem of the church in regard to contemporary economic life is to find the wisdom and the character to participate in the creation and maintenance of a prosperous economy while remaining true to the values which are spiritual and eternal. This we have not done well thus far. To meet our obligations here we must mobilize our best minds and our most courageous spirits to find the way and the courage. Even more difficult, we must find the character to love the things which are eternal rather than those which are temporal and instrumental. In this concern and in most others we must abandon the idea of "solutions" that are either final or

wholly satisfactory. The capacity to produce and benefit by the material goods of an efficient economy while maintaining our awareness of our dependence on God and our love of persons rather than things is a quality of life for which we must never cease to strive.

*Labor and Industrial Relations.* This area of concern is of course a part of the broader problem of the total economic order. Still, it affects so many millions of people and has ramifications in so many other considerations that we need to be aware of it specifically. The principle of Christian vocation is much involved. Ideally, every person's work should be a major expression of his response to God's calling for his life. Yet it is by no means clear how this is always possible in contemporary society, especially for the millions of unskilled or semi-skilled workers. The pressures created by economic responsibility for home and family force many to accept jobs for which they feel no particular calling and which can be regarded as a fulfilment of Christian stewardship only in the most general sense.

The role of the individual Christian and of the Christian community are further complexified by the necessity of political action, union pressures, industrial negotiations, collective bargaining, and mass propaganda campaigns. Just what course of action will be most clearly "Christian" is far from obvious in many crucial situations. As only one illustration, how is the right of the individual to work under conditions of his own choosing to be harmonized with the principle of the closed shop? Understandably, conscientious Christians are to be found on both sides of this issue. Or how does one think and act as a Christian in struggles over such matters as fringe benefits, profit sharing, health insurance, graduated pay increases, or strikes in "essential" industries?

However difficult it may be to identify and keep clearly in mind the meaning and application of Christian commitment in labor and industrial relations, the church must accept this concern and seek with earnestness and



humility to do so. If the church is to achieve relevance in the crucial areas of human experience this can in no wise be omitted.

*Agriculture.* Until very recent years Protestant Christianity in America has been predominantly rural in constituency and in character. While a large number of Protestant congregations are still in very small towns or rural regions, urbanization has affected these churches as it has all other phases of American life. Probably the transition to an essentially urban orientation is the principal problem to be faced by most rural communities.

This transition has economic reflections, of which we became painfully aware during the Great Depression. Perhaps the most serious aspect of agricultural economic difficulties is the progressive reduction in the number of individual families which can maintain themselves economically on the farm. This may have serious foreboding not only for the dispossessed families directly involved, but for our entire economy.

Many of the more able and ambitious children of rural communities do not return after college, giving rise to a worsening problem of leadership in most facets of community life. Here also the conflicts created by the persistence of older social mores in the face of emerging new patterns often is quite acute. Again, preoccupation with the elements of urban life may cloud eyes and minds in regard to the values and advantages of rural life.

The patterns of life and the particular problems posed by the rural community and an agricultural economy in a rapidly urbanizing culture must be a matter of significant concern to a relevant Christian church.

*Public Welfare.* The more interrelatedness and interdependence are developed by contemporary cultural patterns, the more responsibility must be assumed by the whole culture for its individual members. The problem associated with proper forms of fulfilling that responsibility is by no means a simple one. Just where individual responsibility and public responsibility cease and

begin is only one of these problems. What may properly be done by the culture on behalf of the individual and how it may be done without violation of his dignity as a person is perhaps even more basic.

Such areas as public and individual health, unemployment compensation, assistance in job placement, housing for low income groups, retirement and old age security and care, are accepted by most people today as legitimate public concerns. To keep these free from exploitation for commercial or political purposes is by no means easy, however.

Yet another vast area of concern under the heading of public welfare are the institutions maintained by municipal, state, and federal governments—hospitals, schools, mental hospitals, corrective schools, prisons, and therapeutic clinics. For much too long Christians have been only vaguely aware, if at all, of their responsibilities to persons who are served by or confined in such institutions.

*The State.* The Christian church from the first century onward has recognized the necessity of a strong and just political order and has called upon its members to accept full responsibilities of citizenship. The sole basis for exception to voluntary acceptance of the political order recognized by the church has been the replacement of God by the State as the ultimate loyalty. This was the ground for the Roman persecution of the Christians in the first century; they refused to acknowledge that Caesar was God.

The Christian acceptance of and cooperation with the state has not precluded vigorous individual and collective action for change within law; quite the contrary.

Sometimes, as in the case of the Russian Orthodox Church under the tzars, the church has become almost wholly identified with and a servant of the existing political order. Without exception the church in these situations, whether entered into voluntarily or not, has lost its vision and its prophetic voice.



In the contemporary scene the exact nature and extent of the responsibility of the church in its relation to the state are by no means clear. Courageous citizenship and the exercise of the franchise are clearly entailed. Certainly an increasing number of Christians must enter politics professionally as a calling under God. But beyond these basic precepts answers to more specific questions require additional exploration. For instance, to what extent is a large and powerful denomination justified in using that power to bring about legislation which may be consistent with its own moral convictions but in violation of the moral principles of others? In what ways may the organized church cooperate with the government without appearing to grant it an unconditional endorsement on the one hand or become its servant on the other? What is the proper interpretation of the doctrine of separation of church and state in reference to overlapping interest in public welfare, human rights, a just social order, an adequate economy, education for all? To what extent is the church justified in making pronouncements on problems of international relations in which it could not possibly have all the facts, and action on which may of necessity be determined by political rather than ideal theoretical considerations?

The complexity and ambiguity of questions of this kind by no means excuse the church from responsibility in its relation to the state. Because the lives and values of all mankind are involved in functions of domestic and world politics, and because many of the other areas of concern here discussed are heavily dependent upon the actions of governments—the church must seek with devotion and labor to be enlightened in political matters and to do the will of God in this crucial sphere of human activity.

*Race Relations.* In the mid-1960's the problem of race relations is one of the most crucial issues in which our culture is involved. No basic institution within the culture can ignore or sidestep this issue, and none will either

command or deserve respect in the future if it identifies itself with prolongation of injustice. This is particularly true of the church.

From the sixteenth century onward certain of the Protestant sects took clear-cut stands against slavery and all that it entailed. The Quakers were especially outspoken against the slave traffic. John Woolman wrote in his *Journal* (1758) after a Quaker meeting in which slavery had been discussed:

Many Slaves on this Continent are oppressed, and their Cries have reached the Ears of the Most High. Such are the Purity and Certainty of His Judgments that he cannot be partial in our Favour. In infinite Love and Goodness, he hath opened our Understandings, from one Time to another, concerning our Duty towards the People; and it is not a Time for Delay. Should we now be sensible of what is required of us, and, through a Respect to the private Interests of some Persons, or through a Regard to some Friendships which do not stand on an immutable Foundation neglect to do our Duty in Firmness and Constancy, still waiting for extraordinary Means to bring about their Deliverance, it may be by terrible Things in Righteousness God may answer us in this Matter.<sup>2</sup>

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Movement, was equally disturbed by slavery and more vehement in his denunciation of it. Other religious bodies took stands against slavery, but some, both Catholic and Protestant, equivocated or attempted to justify slavery on either biblical or pragmatic grounds. In America during the nineteenth century many churches were bitterly and irreconcilably divided over this issue. Even the Methodists, despite the strong opposition of their founder nearly a century earlier, split into two bodies over slavery and divided church property in an acrimonious court battle.

Following the Civil War a number of churches took

2. JOHN WOOLMAN'S JOURNAL, Muellder & Sears (eds.), THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1940.



the leadership in providing educational opportunities and establishing various forms of philanthropy for the newly freed slaves. Among the most significant of these was The American Missionary Association and The Freedmen's Aid Society. The efforts and accomplishment of the churches in aiding the Negro to claim the fruits of full citizenship were of major importance and will stand as among the finest achievements in the history of the church. Individual clergy and laymen were also among the first to deplore the doctrine of "separate and equal" and the implicit assumption of white supremacy.

The Supreme Court decision of 1954 declaring segregated public schools in violation of the Constitution brought a deep and widespread reaction that has in many ways been as bitter as the terrible years of the mid-nineteenth century when the Civil War was being generated. The record of the churches and of churchmen since the crucial court decision has been an ambiguous one. No one can speak with dependability regarding the actual effect the churches have had upon and within the crisis, for the data have not yet been drawn together in any discernible pattern. It is well known that there has been much individual heroism among both clergy and laymen, and in both races.

The national legislative bodies of most leading denominations have declared segregation unchristian and have called for support of the court decision. Yet there have been glaring gulfs between such declarations and practices in hundreds of local congregations. Incredible as it may seem, racially mixed groups have been turned away from the worship service of some Protestant churches and have been arrested for praying on the steps of the church—this instigated by members and at least condoned by their pastors! Such action by congregations and pastors sometimes has been in direct defiance of the national legislative body of their denomination. While there is evidence that the church has not equivocated as much and been as weak in this crisis as is pop-

ularly believed, neither has it been a clear and clarion voice calling the people to justice or leading the way by example.

The crucial issues for the Christian community as it confronts the race issues are the following:

- (1) Segregation is a form of discrimination against and injury to a whole race of people on completely irrelevant grounds and without regard to individual merit. It is a violation of Christian brotherhood and destroys the reconciling community.
- (2) Segregation makes it impossible to overcome the barrier of hate and misunderstanding between the races.
- (3) Segregation perpetrated or condoned by the Christian community destroys its witness in the world.
- (4) The church can no longer be a party to segregation—hence exploitation—of any minority without denying and destroying the church's own life.

There are clear-cut steps the church must take in the racial crisis if it is to maintain its own integrity. Some of these are the following:

- (1) The church can end segregation in its congregations and its philanthropic and educational institutions.
- (2) It can utilize its personnel and its facilities to become in fact a *reconciling* community. Here, at least, honest persons with honest differences should be able to discuss them in mutual respect.
- (3) Church literature and church schools can teach the facts about race, about problems of minority-majority relationships, and can inculcate Christian attitudes.
- (4) The ecclesiastical organization can protect and support its own ministers and laymen who take seriously the Christian principle of brotherhood



and the pronouncements of the legislative bodies of the churches themselves. Conversely, the ecclesiastical organization can require compliance, at least by pastors, with the stated official position of the church.

- (5) The church can support all who work for the breakdown of barriers between peoples and races. Sometimes such efforts will involve demonstrations or the use of pressures to which there may be violent reactions.
- (6) Christian individuals can work within the framework of law for change in laws which are unjust, within commercial life and educational systems. It can support those institutions, religious and secular, in which discrimination is being erased.
- (7) Christians can scrupulously refrain from statements or actions which encourage irresponsible and vicious persons to employ violence in the maintenance of segregation. Many "solid citizens" who would never engage personally in violence are guilty of leading others to believe that violence will be permitted, if not encouraged. Demagoguery is particularly reprehensible. One can hardly escape the conviction that the context of viciousness and the blatant defiance of the courts for which persons in places of high public trust were responsible, contributed materially to the senseless assassination of President Kennedy.

*Communication.* Modern communication brings into existence an entirely new range of possibilities for freedom or for slavery of the human mind. Mass media such as television, motion pictures, modern journalism, new techniques in economical book production, and others create new and portentous possibilities for informing, persuading, motivating, and controlling thought and action of multitudes of persons.

Mass production of stereophonic records, excellent reproductions of works of visual art, tape recordings of major addresses and interviews, also hold immeasurable potential. These may contribute either to the highest level of artistic creativity and cultural sophistication the world has ever known or to a totally stereotyped and unimaginative acceptance of the tastes of a few "experts" who determine the nature of aesthetic validity.

The mass media of communication are being employed increasingly in the service of many interests—education, politics, sales promotion, cultural change, religion—to mention only a representative few. In consideration of what the manipulation of such power can mean to the critical capacity, accurate knowledge, value appreciation, moral responsibility, ultimate loyalty, and spiritual health of vast numbers of persons, a church that would be relevant to the contemporary world must not be either uninformed or unconcerned about modern communication. Not only must the church explore with greater seriousness than has been general thus far the ethics of mass communication, it also must find and encourage those within its own constituency who are capable of entering the communication field with a sense of Christian vocation.

*World Order.* A book written soon after World War II by a group of scientists who had collaborated in the production of the atomic bomb was significantly entitled, ONE WORLD OR NONE. Herein are presented the alternatives open to us when simultaneously old geographical frontiers are being eliminated, the earth's population is swelling to alarming proportions, and man now has at his command power sufficient to destroy all life on the planet. In circumstances such as these all sane persons are for peace. Few are naive enough to believe that war can be any longer (if, indeed, it ever was) a useful instrument in the ordering of international affairs. But it is not enough to be for peace and against war. Knowledge, wisdom, courage, skill, and tireless industry must be in-



vested in practical measures which make peace possible.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the Christian community as it attempts to relate itself significantly to problems of world order is almost complete lack of sophistication in matters of world politics. For one thing, the church often seems not to understand that national governments are by their nature compelled to put first the supposed safety and advancement of their respective nations. Further, governments are seldom free to be guided solely by ideals in international affairs. They are constrained by commitments of long standing, by the events of recent history, by the fact that their most dependable allies may not share their ideals, by the requirements placed upon them by their obligations to their respective nations, by various kinds of pressures from within their nations, and by the difficulty in properly assessing the intentions of other nations. Many international political decisions must be made on the basis of the greatest possible cleverness and skill in dealing realistically with complicated circumstances. Often there is no clearly "Christian" course open.

The church, therefore, often negates its genuine service to the cause of world order by making idealistic pronouncements which may not at all take account of the realistic situation. Even to declare at certain times unequivocal opposition to use of nuclear weapons may be a disservice to the cause of peace if the only dependable deterrent to a ruthless potential aggressor is the threat of such power. Rather than attempting to make "Christian" pronouncements on matters of sophisticated politics, the church would far better bring its support to the agencies able to work for peace and for broad principles of world justice.

Sometimes what perhaps begins as an admirable intent to be distinctively Christian in international politics results in something far worse than naivete; a self-righteous identification of one's own actions with the will of God. Certainly any person working in the area of practical

politics must accept and act upon conditions that fall far short of one's ideals. But at least under such necessity self-righteousness and self-delusion could be avoided. Dr. Samuel Sharp, professor of international relations at American University comments perceptively upon this matter:

Give unto Caesar? Of course, but with tragic sense of necessity, not with the vulgar joy of Caesar's fellow traveler . . . There is, to my way of thinking a basic difference between religion and religiosity. By the latter I mean a readiness to identify one's expedient actions with principled behavior or even with a manifestation of the divine will and order. There is nothing original in my view, and more competent observers have called attention to the fact that the ready invocation of divine endorsement is in the nature of purchasing a permanent license exempting one from the need to scrutinize every action. Instead of examining your conscience, you just flash your license. . . .

Yet trite as this observation may be, I am amazed—and frankly, shocked—how many such perpetual license holders there are. Since my area of scholarly specialty includes the study of communism, you will understand why I occasionally refer to the license-flashers as “inverted communists” or, in more frivolous moments—or possibly when I am particularly outraged—“God’s own Bolsheviks.” I have always been repelled by the arrogant assumption of communists that all their actions are legitimate and justified because they have the permanent endorsement of History. But offensive as the comparison may be to some, I find it equally upsetting to face people who believe themselves to be in possession of a blanket endorsement by divine Providence, because in my observation they use this presumed endorsement to avoid scrutinizing their specific actions and truly examining their conscience.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most effective safeguards against this kind of self-delusory immorality in political matters is humility before complex issues. Another is a realistic expectation of what can and what cannot be accomplished through

3. Samuel L. Sharp, “Political Realism and Christian Idealism,” FACULTY FORUM, October, 1963.



political structures, domestic or international. It is a mark of maturity to achieve such realism without falling into disillusionment and cynicism. In this connection it is of great value to learn that while the possible always fall short of the ideal, ideals are yet to be held up as the goals toward which to strive and the criteria for measuring achievement. Given a realistic understanding of what is possible, modest advances toward the ideal may be more appreciated, and useful compromises or even honest failures need not be rationalized nor endowed with a righteousness they do not possess. Christians who aspire to be politicians or diplomats need to master the art of useful compromise and to acquire the capacity to accept what is possible at any one point without losing sight of the ideal.

Now, let us observe that the Christian community is not a political body and does not have the responsibilities of a government or of a foreign office. Rather, its responsibility is to be a community of reconciliation, and it is free (indeed, it must) operate outside the political order in fulfilling that responsibility. Specific measures open to the Christian community to an extent impossible to all other agencies, would include: active education on behalf of the United Nations and its agencies of social improvement, work for the establishment of human rights and welfare everywhere, assistance to underprivileged persons, sponsorship and support of intercultural exchanges, work on behalf of the establishment of a body of international law, encouragement of broadened economic cooperation, and sponsorship of competent education in international affairs with attention to their theological dimensions.

More fundamentally, the supranational nature of the Christian church could be more firmly asserted and convincingly demonstrated. It is not to the credit of the Western Christian churches that they have stood off in suspicion of the Prague Peace Conference sponsored by churches of Eastern Europe, while doing nothing com-

parable as a substitute. Recognition of the fact that governments are bound by the demands of international politics should motivate the churches to work for what governments can seldom undertake—the establishment of genuine experiences of reconciliation between peoples. Loyal to his own nation though the Christian may be, he must find means to be true also to the call of Christ which knows no national boundaries.

Further, the church can encourage and assist in the training of many of its most able and dedicated young people to enter the broad area of international affairs, as missionaries, educators, diplomats, writers, and businessmen.

Bearing the difficulties of actually being the church under the conditions of twentieth century life, the Christian community must make its witness within such issues as those discussed above and others.

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## The Contemporary Relevance of the Church: The Witness in a Secular Culture

IMMANUEL KANT once wrote, "In the realm of values<sup>1</sup> everything has either a price or a dignity." Herein is a clue to the nature of a secular culture as we will be thinking of it in this chapter. A secular culture as thus thought about is not simply nonreligious; rather, it is a culture devoted to and preoccupied with commercial values, and in which there is little or nothing possessing a dignity which is beyond price. Ours is such a culture.

The evidences that our secular culture deeply needs the Word of love and reconciliation are numerous. Paul Tillich discusses three basic anxieties which he says are characteristic of our time. These are the anxiety of fate and death, the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness, and the anxiety of guilt and condemnation.

The anxiety of fate and death is most basic, most universal, and inescapable. All attempts to argue it away are futile. Even if the so-called arguments for the "immortality of the soul" had argumentative power (which they do not have) they would not convince existentially . . . The anxiety of death is the permanent horizon within which the anxiety of fate is at work . . . The anxiety of meaninglessness is anxiety about the loss of an ultimate concern, of a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings . . .

1. Literally, "ends."

The anxiety of emptiness is aroused by the threat of nonbeing to the special contents of the spiritual life . . . (it) drives us to the abyss of meaninglessness . . . A profound ambiguity between good and evil permeates everything (man) does, because it permeates his personal being as such. Nonbeing is mixed with being in his moral self-affirmation as it is in his spiritual . . . self-affirmation. The awareness of this ambiguity is the feeling of guilt. It is present in every moment of moral self-awareness and can drive us toward complete self-rejection, to the feeling of being condemned—not to an external punishment but to the despair of having lost our destiny.<sup>2</sup>

To each of these anxieties the Christian witness is relevant. They cannot be attacked directly, since an anxiety is a diffused form of disturbance, not consisting of specific fears but rather of a general frame of reference in which all specific experiences are prejudged in negative terms. One of the most excruciating aspects of anxiety is its general inspecific nature.

## I

### **What Is the Witness to Be?**

There are three fundamental problems to which the church must speak in contemporary terms if the Christian witness to this secular culture is to be truly relevant: 1. The nature of knowledge, evidence, and the ground of Christian belief; 2. the nature of man; 3. the nature and interrelation of values and the responsibility they entail. We turn to each of these in order.

1. The nature of knowledge, evidence, and the ground of Christian belief.

The two facts about our time which make this a fundamental concern are excessive trust in scientific method and skepticism. Both of these must be faced and dealt with if the Christian witness is to seem to many persons

2. Paul Tillich, *THE COURAGE TO BE*, 42-53. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952.

from every intellectual stratum to have genuine foundation in fact.

Most simply stated, knowledge is a claim about reality which is confirmed according to some norm of truth. Men have always aspired to perfect knowledge, and have always failed to achieve it. The results of man's efforts to attain knowledge are always hypotheses, that is, guesses. These "guesses" need not be uninformed nor absurd. Indeed, the centuries of effort to solve persistent human problems have produced excellent techniques for studying these problems and for constructing hypotheses which have high degrees of probability. Nevertheless, final certainty has always been beyond the grasp of the human mind. Scientists, theologians, and philosophers have been impatient with the hypothetical nature of human knowledge and some have believed they have constructed systems by which certainty could be achieved. Yet the whole history of human thought is strewn with the wreckage of these scientific, philosophical, or theological systems.

Science is a highly effective technique for constructing, testing, and improving hypotheses concerning physical objects or behavior which can be observed and catalogued. Its achievements in pushing back ignorance about the physical nature of our world, in helping us to conquer disease and hunger, and in guiding us to more adequate adjustment to physical law have been astounding. Yet, sometimes out of genuine naivete and sometimes from design this approach to certain kinds of problems has been endowed with infallibility and its proper limitations obliterated. Anyone who has even a cursory knowledge of the history of science knows that there is nothing more temporary, more subject to extensive revision or discard within a generation, than scientific theories.

Even if science were infallible within its own legitimate sphere, it could in no wise be applied with even moderate efficiency to questions the data of which are not measur-



able or observable. The very validity of scientific method is dependent upon its being strictly limited to a study of physical data. The most perceptive scientists know this well and are most concerned to limit the claims of scientific applicability. To this point an eminent creative scientist has written:

Science has become self-conscious and comparatively humble. We are no longer taught that the scientific method of approach is the only valid method of acquiring knowledge about reality. Eminent men of science are insisting, with what seems a strange enthusiasm, on the fact that science gives us but a partial knowledge of reality, and we are no longer required to regard as illusory everything that science finds itself able to ignore. But the enthusiasm with which some men of science preach that science has limitations is not really surprising. For the universe of science, if accepted as the final reality, made of man an entirely accidental by-product of a huge, mindless, purposeless, mathematical machine. And there are men of science sufficiently human to find such a conclusion disconcerting . . . We need not be surprised, therefore, to find that the discovery that science no longer compels us to believe in our own essential futility is greeted with acclamation, even by some scientific men.\*

Thus there need be no concern that Christian understanding of God and man and the ultimate meaning of life and death can neither be verified nor denied by scientific method. The Christian faith speaks to questions to which scientific method is inapplicable. The fact that Christians have sometimes sought to answer essentially scientific questions by deduction from theological pre-suppositions has been unfortunate and confusing.

Turning to skepticism as an impediment for some to acceptance of the Christian witness, we find that when skepticism is something more than a depressed psychological state, it is often an extreme reaction to the impos-

3. J. W. N. Sullivan, *THE LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE*, 138-139. New York: The New American Library (a Mentor book), 1933.

sibility of absolute certainty. Yet it does not follow that because we cannot know everything we cannot know anything. The fact is that there are techniques for dealing with experience in such manner as to bring us into progressively improved adaptation to reality. There are many excellent books dealing with the methods of arriving at reliable knowledge about most areas of human experience. Skepticism simply is not a supportable position regarding the possibility of knowledge. No interpretation of human experience, whether it be a scientific, philosophical, or theological interpretation, can be dismissed arbitrarily by a prior judgment of skepticism. All such claims must be considered on their own merits.

The Christian witness must not be excused from the necessity of offering substantial evidence in its behalf. The attempt by some theologians in this century to deny that "Christian truth" must be supported by evidence that convinces open and searching minds has rendered the Christian witness suspect in many quarters where intellectual integrity is taken seriously. Especially unfortunate have been the attempts to create acceptance for Christian faith through attacks upon reason, as though an unreasonable or even an irrational faith is stronger than the faith of a reasonable person! Tertullian's dictum in regard to Christian dogma, "it is true because it is absurd," does not recommend itself well to honest and critical minds.

Neither does it help very much simply to reassert with renewed fervor that "Christian truth" is self-evident and that when men are confronted with "God's Word" they will be convinced inescapably. This simply is not true. The claim that to ask for further evidence is to make the Word of God subordinate to human reason must be set aside as fuzzy thinking. Such a claim ignores a prior question: "How, from among the many 'words,' Christian and other, is the genuine Word of God to be recognized?" Psychological certainty and spiritual enthusiasm on behalf of the various candidates may be in some ways praise-

worthy, but these qualities may actually confuse the issue when one is concerned to be honest with the facts of experience. In the long-run, genuine faith is never well served by taking lightly the demand for evidence. Attempts to sidestep this demand are among the most serious causes of contemporary suspicion of the Christian witness.

What, then, are the grounds of Christian belief in the twentieth century? First, there is the testimony of the first disciples of Jesus Christ and of the early church that they found through him reconciliation to God. Second, there is the persistence through nearly twenty centuries with which persons of all races and nations, all stations in life, and all levels of intelligence and training have reconfirmed the reports of the first century Christians. Third, there is the incontestable fact that no other event has made the impact on human history that was made by the life and death of Jesus Christ; no other understanding of God and man has so determined the nature of the fundamental institutions of an era.

Fourth, there is the fact that the Christian understanding of God as a creator acting in wisdom, purpose, and love makes some sense out of a universe which obviously cannot be the chance product of blind force. Closely associated is the fact that human life itself takes on meaning when man, rather than "a disease of the agglutinated dust on the face of a second rate planet" is a child of that creative love.

Fifth, there is the extent to which the Christian witness gives meaning to life in the twentieth century and speaks the Word which otherwise is missing from life. According to the Christian view, twentieth century man has become lost and estranged from God. The deepest problems man faces cannot be dealt with through the techniques of science; indeed, technology and the depersonalization it requires and creates are generative of some of these problems. Man's handicaps are ignorance, finitude, and sin; and the greatest of these is sin. Man's need is for creative

love. Only God through reconciling love can heal man's sickness. God has acted in Jesus Christ and acts in untraceable ways in this moment to reconcile men to himself and to one another. Man can love his fellowmen because man is first loved by God. Thus is estrangement overcome and a community of love established. What word is more relevant to this moment? What diagnosis of the human condition is more incisively accurate? What prescription for man's need offers greater promise of coming to grips with his deepest needs?

The sixth ground for the Christian claim is the experience of the individual who opens up his mind in faith to that claim. The doctrine of salvation by faith alone is a profound cornerstone of Protestant Christianity, but, alas, is widely misconstrued by friend and foe alike. This misconception is based at least partially upon ambiguity regarding the meaning of faith, itself. Certainly faith cannot mean blind assent to some dogma, whether ecclesiastically or scripturally based. Neither can it mean self-coercion of the will to the end that belief in some absurdity (or even some possibility) is dishonestly embraced. There is neither scriptural nor speculative grounds for such an understanding of faith.

Faith that can heal must be active. There is no passive healing agent for the ailing person. The faith that opens the way to reconciliation with God is man's venturesome response to God's initiative in Jesus Christ. This must be a response of the whole person, and always lacking the security of certainty. In the face of life's most exacting demands man must always act in faith. The choice he can make is an answer to the question, "faith in what?" The faith to which the Christian is a witness is faith in God. In simplest terms, this means a willingness to act upon the trust, the hope, even the guess, that the Christian witness is true and that the healing love of God may be known. It is, as a minimum, an open-minded willingness to experiment to determine whether experience will support the Christian claim.

Now the fact is that in every age countless thousands of persons have been utterly convinced that their ventures in faith have been supported by the realities of life. They have found composure in the face of threat and danger, strength to bear whatever life held, a new integrity and fidelity in their solemn commitments, sharpened skills with which to do their daily work, the ability to love the unloving and unlovely; most of all, they have grown into a deep-reaching assurance that they are known and loved of God. This testimony of the ages and in the life of the individual must not be underestimated.

It is worth noting that when a person or community acting in faith becomes a different person or community because of that act, faith may also be an element in determining the fact. In this way and to this extent, at least, a deeper knowledge of the reality of God's love is known within the commitment of faith.

Faith and reason are not competing approaches to truth. Faith is more than logic; yet when incoherence and irrationality are accepted in the name of faith, faith must suffer. Reason, understood as man's effort to face facts with integrity and realism, may be thought of as the platform on which one stands while reaching out with faith into the unknown.

a rational man's faith is strongest when he feels it is continuous with what he believes, on good evidence, to be the facts . . . that knowledge is not a substitute for love, or for the faith that makes the world over, no one denies; but neither are these things substitutes for knowledge. They can, indeed, be dangerous and insane if they are separate from knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

How, then, may it be known with final certainty that the Christian claim is true? The answer is that final certainty here as elsewhere is not possible. The insecurity of finite wisdom must be endured. But the Christian witness does speak to real and persistent human problems and

4. Charles Frankel, "Seeing Things in Double Focus," art., 1953.

speaks relevantly. Searching spirits and critical minds throughout the ages have testified to its veracity. The very foundation on which our cultural age has been erected reflects the impact this witness has made on human history. And those who venture in courageous and intelligent faith find that the realities of experience sustain the Christian witness. All of this and more is evidence when considered by honest and careful minds, just as surely as the observations of an astronomer are evidence.

That the Christian faith is not wishful credulity but founded solidly upon arresting evidence is the first ingredient in the witness of the church to a secular culture.

## 2. The Nature of Man

Ultimately, there are two possible contrasting views regarding the nature of man. One of these was well-stated by Paul:

. . . What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body . . . When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is thy victory?"

O death, where is thy sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

The other was beautifully phrased by a humanist philosopher:

This great and eternal Nature it is in which we ever live and move and have our being. Thus, beyond our kinship with our fellow men, there is always our kinship with the natural world that sustains us with its varied goods and stirs us with its

5. I Corinthians 15:42-57.

wonderful beauty. This dynamic Nature stamps its pattern of constant change on every existing thing. Change means transformation, beginnings, endings, death. So it is that the freshness and delight of each new day, the blessed zest of living, are crossed by the sting of transiency . . . All that lives must die . . .

We recognize these truths. And we accept as inevitable the eventual extinction of human individuals and the return of their bodies, indestructible in their ultimate elements, to the Nature that brought them forth. In death as in life we belong to Nature.<sup>6</sup>

It makes immeasurable difference whether one believes that man is a child of God, destined to "put on immortality," or that Nature has put upon man the stamp of transiency and death.

It makes a difference, for instance, when one inquires about one's own *identity* within the new cosmology which is emerging with the twentieth century scientific revolution, to which we called attention earlier. In consideration of the immeasurable vastness of reality and even the possibility of life, even of much higher forms of life on other planets or in other unknown universes, how are we to answer the question, "Who is man?" How apt are the oft-quoted words of Pascal from another century:

When I consider the brief span of my life swallowed up in the eternity before and behind it, the small space that I fill or even see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces which I know not, and which know not me, I am afraid, and wonder to see myself here rather than there; for there is no reason I should be here rather than there, now rather than then.

The Christian understanding of who man is, is reflected poetically in the words of Jesus:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your father's will. But even

6. Corliss Lamont, A HUMANIST FUNERAL SERVICE.



the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.'

What one believes about man makes a great deal of difference also as he attempts to find *meaning* in existence. Human personality is so constructed that a meaningless existence is ultimately intolerable. Men construct myths according to which life is given meaning in terms of national superiority (the Third Reich, for example), or in devotion to transcendent social structures (the classless society), or in the achievement of mystical identification with some sort of impersonal spiritual forces (art for art's sake). Yet the passage from Corliss Lamont with which this section was introduced sums up eloquently the ultimate meaninglessness of the best that man can achieve in an impersonal universe; "This dynamic Nature stamps its pattern of constant change . . . transformation, beginnings, endings, death, . . . on everything." The only alternative to meaninglessness is a God who has created us in love and whose purpose that we should become his sons gives our lives meaning. This the Christian faith asserts about man.

The moral complexities of contemporary life further emphasize the importance of an understanding of man. Who can examine his own experience and deny that deep within himself there is the inescapable expectation of moral responsibility? No man can live with moral guilt, hence our incredible rationalization of shoddy conduct. (Even Adolf Hitler displayed a compulsion to find moral justification for the Nazi horror.) Yet, who can find his way satisfactorily amid the moral complexities of the twentieth century? At best our understanding of the right is limited and often confused.

Our problem, however, involves something more than ignorance or limitation. As a matter of experience, all of us know that we do not even consistently do the best we

know. Realizing this, we are yet unable within ourselves to find and mobilize the resources which will strengthen our flickering wills. According to the Christian interpretation of man, this moral inconstancy is at root, sin. It is denial of sonship and misuse of our God-given power to make responsible choices. The result is a sickness that strikes at the will itself and produces estrangement from God.

That man is a sinner is not a uniquely Christian insight. This same conclusion has been arrived at by many pathways, though the condition can be described in other terms. What is unique about the Christian witness, what makes it good news, is the conviction that God has acted in love through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to heal man of his sin and to restore him to sonship.

The Christian faith speaks also to man's ultimate anxiety, the anxiety of death. The mature person revolts against the finality of death for reasons far more significant than an egocentric desire for immortality or fear. Death of personality, if this be the final fact, entails some unavoidable conclusions about both man and God. For man, it means that life and values really do not have permanent significance after all. Regarding God, either he does not exist, or he is incapable of preserving the lives of his children, or he does not care. None of these conclusions is acceptable if it can be avoided in honesty. It is not surprising, therefore, that under the impact of a wholly secular conception of man the conviction of the finality of death creates anxiety, even when fear is not present.

The Christian believes that personal life at last conquers death because he believes in the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Believing that God is a father who creates in love and who cherishes his children, the Christian can believe that man survives organic death. There is no other defensible ground for such belief.

This, then, is the witness of the church to a secular age regarding man: That however vast and complex our uni-

verse may prove to be, man possesses identity within it; that human life is meaningful life and not mere existence; that God has acted to heal man's sin and to reconcile man unto God; that personality conquers death because of God's love and integrity. This witness, too, needs to be heard.

### 3. The nature of values and the responsibility they entail.

Every attempt to come to terms with ultimate meaning is based in part upon a body of judgments concerning value, whether its proponents speak in such terms or not. Thus, dialectical materialism regards the classless society as the highest value, and holds that the key to such a society is appropriate control and manipulation of the economy. For Buddhism Nirvana is the supreme value, and the Buddha prescribed a Noble Eightfold Path as the Way to enter this exquisite state. Naturalistic humanism holds emancipated man to be the ultimate value and judges all institutions and social structures according to their effect upon men. These will do to illustrate the point that at the heart of every body of convictions regarding the meaning and end of life there are significant value judgments.

The Christian faith rests in part upon the conviction that the highest value is to become in fact a child of God and thus fulfil his creative love. Since each person has identity before God and is precious in his sight, all institutions must be measured according to their effects upon the fulfilment of man's sonship. Christians have always differed regarding just what such sonship means in fact. In my judgment, to be a son of God is to be free, as freedom was described in Chapter Four: To develop and employ in responsible creativity the potentialities with which God has endowed each person.

If similarities to the value-base of naturalistic humanism be recognized, that need not be disturbing. For both Christian and humanist, individual man is the measure of all other values. The difference, a profound one, is in the

understanding of what constitutes wholeness. For the humanist, it is the natural man freed from all artificial fetters, thus able to be completely what natural processes have produced. For the Christian, wholeness consists of being lifted by the love of God into a level of creative responsibility man could never achieve through any strategic mobilization of his own capacities. The humanist value structure rests precariously on the preferences of altruistically inclined men; there is no assurance that such values will be recognized as prior very long or very widely. The Christian value-base, on the other hand, roots deep in the integrity of the creative force of the universe.

This basic Christian conviction regarding the nature of value was not proclaimed by any arbitrary act, human or divine. It grew slowly out of a centuries-long empirical search. It was built slowly through much costly and sometimes tragic experimentation. It took account both of human responsibility and human sinfulness. Among the many meanings the Bible has for the Christian is the fact that it is a graphic account of a part of this human search for the truly valuable.

This value-base of the Christian faith, once achieved, becomes a landmark by which we may be guided in the answers to many associated questions. A scale of values, for instance may be established. The problem of the relation between universal values and particular values also may have light thrown on it. The difference between true and false value claims may be seen more clearly. The identification of evil, as the denial and destroyer of man's relation to God, may be aided.

At least as important in our time as all the above questions is clarification of the relation between intrinsic and instrumental values. If, as was maintained in the opening paragraph of this chapter, ours is a time when commercial values dominate and there are few that possess a dignity beyond price, a part of the difficulty probably is confusion regarding the nature of the intrinsically valuable.

Intrinsic values, those which have worth in and of

themselves, which possess a dignity, are those experiences which enable a person to become a free, responsible, creative person. Instrumental values are those experiences or conditions which make intrinsic values possible. Certainly intrinsic values are to be chosen above instrumental when such choice is necessary. This is only another way of saying persons are more important than things. Again, within the Christian faith, such conviction is not arbitrary; it is inescapable within the Christian understanding of man and God.

This is by no means to say that instrumental values are unimportant. Indeed, by definition, they are what make the values of dignity possible. On such understanding must the Christian evaluate the scientific and technological achievements of this century. Faster than sound travel, world-wide communication, lowered infant mortality rates, improved housing, more efficient school plants and equipment, wonder drugs, blood banks, mass production of food and the artifacts of life are all good, and are only a few of the manifold goods for which science and technology are responsible. Rather than deploring the ascendancy of technology, the Christian should rejoice in it because of what it can mean in the struggle for human freedom.

The economic structure, the experimental laboratories, the industrial plants, the armies of skilled and semi-skilled workers, the instruments of distribution, the educational devices by which use is taught—all of these are the instruments by which technological advance are brought to the service of persons, and hence may be blessed in the name of God. The values of price are evil only when it is forgotten that their rightful function is to make the values of dignity possible. The same criterion by which instrumental values are identified must be applied to save them from degenerating into instrumental evils. All of these things the Christian must find ways of saying in his witness to a secular culture.

One thing more, the Christian must declare in this re-

gard: That the Christian *understanding* of value, while essential, is yet not enough. The value in persons can be honored in practice above the value in things only when we love. Thus the Christian witness must proclaim an absolute, to which all else is relative. That absolute is that in all of our dealings with persons we seek ever to act in a love that appreciates and cherishes values. Manifestly, this is not possible except as God loves us and enables us to love. This, too, the Christian must make a part of his witness in a secular culture.

## II

### The Problem of Communication

It is by no means easy to communicate the Christian witness to the contemporary mind. A part of the problem is that our culture already has gone a long way toward secularization, thus constructing a frame of reference within which the Christian faith seems irrelevant if not nonsensical. But there is an additional difficulty for which the Christian community itself may be largely responsible. This is the fact that the language which Christians employ to communicate their faith often conveys nothing very clear or significant to the twentieth century mind. The difficulty arises only partially from the secularization of the culture; it is at least equally due to a preference within the Christian community for terms which were vivid with meaning for earlier centuries but which no longer seem to refer to anything real in experience.

It is almost as important to speak in relevant terms through effective channels of communication as it is to have a relevant faith to communicate. Yet with rare exceptions the creeds, the affirmations of faith, and the liturgies employed in churches are stated in terms which are two hundred to five hundred years old, and speak in figures that do not even suggest the context of contemporary life. Sermons, religious articles, hymns, and even poetry and drama which attempt to speak the Word often suffer from this same weakness. Seldom does the language of



the church take account of the vast increase of knowledge concerning the world and the universe through physical science, or the understandings of personality which have grown up through psychiatry and psychology. Often the fact that the twentieth century finds man involved in problems which were not even dreamed of in the sixteenth century is ignored.

There is, of course, something to be said for the place of creeds and affirmations which bespeak the continuity of the Christian community across time and place and the difference of circumstances. There is also much to be said against a witness which exhibits no awareness of the heritage which undergirds the faith. Nevertheless, I would argue that there is nothing sacred about any particular vocabulary, and that to learn to communicate in the language of one's own time does not necessitate ignorance of one's heritage. It is very interesting to realize that for many people the historic statements of the Christian faith signify identification with our heritage only after these have been clarified by contemporary restatement.

If the witness is to be made to a secular culture the Christian community must improve its capacity to employ twentieth century language and to speak in figures which are relevant to contemporary life.

In this connection it is important for the church to be aware of the present effectiveness of a number of media which are essentially artistic in nature. These include the theater, the screen, television, painting, three dimensional art, various other visual arts, music, and architecture. Several centuries ago the church was the chief patron of the arts, and it is significant that much of the great art of the past was theologically grounded. It is unfortunate, indeed, that in recent years the term "religious art" has acquired almost universally a connotation of superficiality and sentimentality.

Efforts of the church in recent years to speak through some of these media have, with certain exceptions, been far from encouraging. The fundamental criticisms of such

efforts have been that they lack theological depth and they "use" art to teach moral homilies or to promote church campaigns. These criticisms have far too much foundation in fact. Whatever else a work of art may be, it must have an integrity of its own, and what it communicates must arise from its intrinsic nature. "Used" art is always prostituted art.

There is no direct means whereby a genuine Christian art can be developed. There are some indirect means. To begin with, there must be a recognition that artistic creation is an expression of spirit. The work of the artist must be understood as one possible fulfilment of Christian calling, indeed as a special form of fulfilment, even as the ministry, medicine, or teaching. When these insights are reclaimed, the church should then attempt to identify and counsel its own young people who possess artistic talent. Their education should become a major concern of the church. Education for the young Christian artist should include not only technical training, but studies in the history and philosophy of art, the history of the Christian church, and theology. In twenty-five years under such an approach the church could nurture within its own life a quality of art that surpasses anything the church is now fostering.

There is also the possibility of fruitful conversation with artists outside the Christian community. Such conversation is possible when it is understood that any genuine work of art brings man into confrontation with basic questions of meaning, value, significance, and salvation. The answer given may be Christian or not, but it is to such questions that the Christian faith speaks. Thus is there a basis for discussion with any serious artist, regardless of his own philosophical orientation.

Such conversations have been undertaken in a few instances in recent years, and with notable success. The first reaction on the part of the artist often has been surprise and incredulity that the church should be genuinely interested in discussing art as art. When it be-

came clear that this was indeed true, there usually has been enthusiastic response and an eagerness to know more precisely what the Christian faith does have to say to basic life-issues. In a few cases artists who have been regarded as wholly secular have rendered services to the church which it could not have purchased at any price.

A great deal more remains to be done by the church first in understanding art and next in speaking the Christian witness through artistic media.

There are at least three other forms of communication which are particularly important in the church's need to achieve relevance to the contemporary scene.

The first of these is self-investment in daily work with a conviction of calling under God. The Christian claim holds that God is the Lord of all life. Man spends more of his life and expresses himself more fully in work than in any other activity. Thus if the Christian witness is to have demonstrable validity it must be reflected in the choice of occupation and in the intent and spirit with which it is fulfilled. It has been only in recent years, under the impact of contemporary secularization, that the Christian community has grown oblivious to God's sovereignty over work. It is indispensable that this be regained.

A start could be made among the professions most traditionally associated with the concept of "calling"—the ministry, medicine, teaching. Even in these, prior consideration for purely commercial motives has made serious inroads. But no honorable work is totally without capacity to be a medium of witness to God's calling. Earning a reasonable living for one's family is an honorable motive when its fulfilment does not ignore one's obligations to the wider human community. All Christians should be concerned with such motives. Yet the Christian understanding of vocation goes beyond this to take account of such questions as: Does this work enable me to use my peculiar capabilities in the fullest and most constructive manner? What is the effect of my work upon society? What legitimate service does it ren-

der? To what extent does the profit I derive from it represent deserved compensation for service rendered? What does fulfilment of my work do to my character?

The Christian witness in vocation will reflect concern for the right relation between intrinsic and instrumental values. It will thus refuse work which is of no value, while at the same time understanding that even work on the production line of a factory is an instrumental value in a culture that benefits from mass application of technology.

A second channel of communication which should be mentioned here is the acceptance by the Christian community of social responsibility, both as a community and as sensitive individuals. What the Christian community does or fails to do in response to social injustice speaks eloquently of its own deepest commitments. In Chapter Seven we looked at some of the areas of contemporary life within which Christian concern must be communicated by action.

The third form of witness to be added to the present discussion is the Christian appropriation of things. A few pages earlier we have discussed the light Christian convictions throw upon the proper place of instrumental values. All that is being added now is to note that to put into practice what is thus implied is itself an important form of witness in a secular culture in which things loom so large.

This responsibility is not simply fulfilled. Both knowledge and the guidance of the Holy Spirit will be required as the Christian seeks to find his way between asceticism on the one hand and luxury on the other. Asceticism may have validity for a few individuals as a permanent way of life, and for everyone from time to time as a means of purging. However, asceticism cannot be prescribed as a general practice except in denial that the world God created is good. On the other hand, luxury by its very nature involves self-indulgence and the enthronement of instrumental values above the intrinsic.

The Christian witness requires the capacity to benefit from things without forgetting they are instruments only. It requires also the perceptivity to recognize the potential worth which things possess. It requires concern for efficient production and equitable distribution of things. It requires the willingness to invest major time, resources, and creativity in the development and application of technology to human need. It requires, perhaps most centrally, the willingness to sacrifice things and the benefits they entail in the fulfilment of one's discipleship. Even as Christ himself, the Christian must often make his witness in that while he appreciates instrumental values, he voluntarily foregoes them in his dedication to the calling of God in paths of denial and suffering.

### **III**

#### **What Results May Be Expected From the Christian Witness in a Secular Culture?**

There is no way of answering this question ahead of time. Only the historian—and he only partially—can identify and evaluate the effectiveness of the Christian witness. The calling of the Christian is to be a witness, with all the integrity, skill, and persuasiveness he can mobilize. God will use the witness according to his wisdom and the receptivity of men. The virtues of patience and trust are both helpful and becoming in this regard.

While we may not predict with what effectiveness the Christian witness is to be made in our present secular culture, we may formulate criteria by which its effectiveness may be measured. The following characteristics should emerge in a culture where the Christian witness has been effective:

1. A pattern of life in which the cause of human freedom has been advanced.
2. Institutions which release the human spirit and support human fulfilment.

3. An improved capacity to distribute equitably the products of technological achievement, while not subjugating the individual to collectivization of life.
4. Improved ability to use things to enrich the human spirit.
5. A reawakened awareness of God's immanence in human affairs.

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## **The Contemporary Relevance of the Church: The Witness on Campus**

THE TWENTIETH century church is called to be relevant to the will of God on the one hand and to the condition of man on the other. Its work is witness in word and deed to the faith that man's drive for freedom can find fulfilment in, and only in, obedience to God. The good news the church has to proclaim is that God has acted supremely in Jesus Christ, yet acts anew again and again, to motivate, guide, and correct man's struggle to achieve the stature of sonship for which he was created.

There is no more strategic and challenging context in which the witness of the church is to be made than the college and university campus.

### **I**

#### **The Nature of the University**

Taking university as a generic term, let us inquire concerning its nature. It is by no means a simple matter to be both comprehensive and accurate in defining the university. Much of what is partially correct about the university is often over-idealized or over-simplified. Thus, for instance the classical definition of the university as "a whole body, community, or guild of masters and scholars," certainly has much of truth in it and must be recognized as the ideal to which the university aspires. Yet anyone who knows the contemporary university even superficially recognizes how much this would leave unsaid even if it were wholly factual. There are also many

facetious definitions such as, "a university is a stadium surrounded by classrooms," or "a university is a collection of buildings joined together by a central heating system." These are ridiculous exaggerations, but like all caricatures, are founded on a modicum of truth.

Two approaches offer the most promise of understanding the university. One is definition in terms of the function or role it is assigned in our culture. The other is description of the persons who constitute it.

### *A. The Role of the University*

The university plays a multiple role in contemporary American life. For one thing it is the repository of the accumulated information and wisdom of the past. It is also the teacher who introduces students to this intellectual heritage, guides them in evaluation of it, and instructs them in its appropriation.

A second role of the modern university is in some ways a contradiction of its heritage. Traditionally, the university has placed the growth and creative expression of the intellectual central. Such concepts as "pure science," or "truth for truth's sake," while seldom if ever wholly realized, are very helpful in understanding what the university community has long regarded as centrally important. Today, however, "pure science" is pushed to the periphery by preoccupation with the training of technicians, scientific or social. There is very little attention given to theoretical science in university science departments or to theoretical studies of man and society in social sciences. The staggering need for technicians—persons who can manipulate instruments, can measure and count, can perform accurately the mechanical skills required in appropriating scientific knowledge through mass production methods to the needs of an expanding population, is rapidly turning university science departments into training centers for skilled laborers.

One of the few shining examples of the university functioning as searcher after truth for its own sake today

is the Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies. Here scholars of proved creative capacity are freed from all specific assignments and are provided every needed facility to pursue their own special work. They have no classes to meet; they are not required to "produce" anything or to publish anything. The only guarantee that they will work at all is their previously demonstrated ability and their integrity as scholars. The net product of creative advance in a number of important areas is ample evidence of the value of such a working situation.

Even the vast research projects financed at large university centers by government subsidies are fundamentally different from the traditional free and creative experimentation of the theoretical scientist. These projects do not take "truth for truth's sake" or "pure science" as their guiding principles. Rather, these are highly organized efforts to answer certain quite specific questions whose solution is necessary to projects which the government considers essential. The large majority of these questions have to do with the improvement of technological warfare, though many also have important implications for peaceful industry, for improved living conditions, or for the public health. Understandably, these projects often are characterized by a nervous urgency to achieve a "break through" in knowledge. Success often results in need for a new corps of technicians to apply the new information.

The two roles described briefly above help to set the conditions for a third; that of an institution within the established order. There are several institutions which give form to and reenforce contemporary culture; some of these are our modified democratic government, a controlled capitalistic economy, the church, and the university. Each of these has an essential contribution to make to cultural stability, and each in turn derives strength for its own life and purposes from its participation in a stable culture. Each inescapably becomes identified with and dependent upon the culture.

The institutional role of the university is sometimes in conflict with a fourth essential role it must play. The university must be also a constructive critic of the established order. A society which lacks or loses the capacity for self-criticism must soon decline from stagnation or lack of vision or both. Criticism is not an end in itself. Self-criticism is an instrumental value. This fact makes two demands upon the university as critic; it must identify and clarify those permanent and intrinsic values according to which the status quo is properly evaluated, and it must search for practical alternatives which offer promise of improvement.

The dilemma faced by the institutionalized university in its role as critic is not unlike that faced by the institutionalized church in its role as prophet. As it seeks to fulfil this role the university will sometimes deeply disturb persons and groups who believe their own values to be dependent upon the maintenance of the status quo. This is especially true as the university criticizes the economic order, the political structure, or ethnically based social stratification. Further, because the modern university in the Western world is so dependent upon the success of the capitalistic economy, it may well find itself deeply immersed in a conflict of interest in its role as critic aligned against those who could make available the new library or the higher faculty salaries that are so much needed.

A still further role is assigned to the modern university, one that was not at all foreseen in the classical concept. This is the role of guiding and motivating adolescents toward maturity. It is utterly unrealistic to assume that students entering college are adults. Often they come with considerable social experience and may have developed the appearance of a certain amount of sophistication. Yet in terms of their emotional maturity, their insight regarding true value, their ability to make major decisions wisely, their capacity to assume personal responsibility for disciplined study, or their awareness of



or interest in the complicated problems facing the nation and the world, they are very adolescent. A considerable proportion of funds available to the university and a constantly expanding professional staff are required to operate student personnel offices through which the university seeks to counsel, guide, and contribute toward the maturity of adolescents. The importance of this function cannot be overestimated, and the responsibilities it entails are by no means limited to student personnel officers. Every professor and chaplain and administrative officer dealing with the student shares in it, and every class, living situation, and regulation governing student affairs affects it.

It is unfortunate, indeed, that far too many colleges, rather than contributing toward maturity, substitute custodial care and achieve only an unnatural extension of adolescence. A few go to the other extreme, assuming that high school graduates are adults, refusing to accept the role of counselor and guide toward maturity, sometimes with regrettable results.

Here, then, are some of the major roles assigned to the university in contemporary culture: conserver and teacher of the knowledge and wisdom of the past, researcher on questions of military efficiency and public well being, trainer of technicians, institutional bulwark of the established order, constructive critic of the established order, and counselor to adolescents enroute to maturity.

#### *B. The Persons Who Constitute the Academic Community*

Like all generalizations, any attempt at describing the hundreds of thousands of students and faculty members in universities will be an oversimplification. Certain characteristics or attitudes which are widely observable may be reported. These can be useful in understanding the academic community in the aggregate. However, such descriptions necessarily omit important individual differences, and thus any student or professor selected at

random may be very unlike the composite persons discussed here.

### *Students*

"Today's student" reflects the world he lives in; its efficiency, its anxieties, its materialism, its detachment from the moorings of authority and tradition, its longing for tranquility.

His materialism is straight-forward and unreflective. By the time he reaches college he has learned that regardless of how much it is denied that material values come first, this is the practical rule of thumb by which the society he knows lives. He sees no reason to conceal his own adoption of this standard and so does not.

One direct result of this materialism is the almost total loss of any sense of calling—vocation in its pure sense—in the selection of a profession or occupation. Fortunately, there is a strong minority of whom this, as well as some other characteristics which will be mentioned, is not true. Yet the loss of calling is widespread, even among professions such as the ministry, medicine, and teaching. Consequently, fewer and fewer first rate young minds are turning to the ministry or teaching; and fewer and fewer who turn toward medicine have any very distinct altruistic motivation.

A second and closely related effect of materialism upon the student is the growing tendency to regard one's occupation as essentially a means to an end—material comfort and security. Not only does the student select his occupation with no sense of calling; having selected it, he often has no devotion to it, other than to fulfil what is legitimately expected of him by his employers; this often because only thus can he protect the comfort and security for which he is really working. The idea of finding that occupation for which one is peculiarly suited and devoting a major part of one's abilities and time to it because it is worth doing for its own sake is not widely held. Any transfer of the pride and devotion of the crafts-

man of another day to the occupations of the mid-twentieth century is meager indeed.

This discussion of the materialism of today's student should not lead us to the impression that he is a clod who has no appreciation of the poetic, the aesthetic, or the spiritual. Quite the contrary is the case. The fact is that his aesthetic tastes are more sophisticated than those of any previous student generation. Listening to the music played on the jukebox in the student union might seem to belie this estimate. Do not be misled by this. Most students tolerate the more shallow music forms for their noise quality, nothing more. Many students are at an age when sheer noise in a public gathering place such as a student union is a value in itself. But if you want to know what kind of music a large number of students take seriously, visit the hi-fi stereo listening room in that same union building. There you will find students listening for hours to a wide variety of music forms and expressions, ranging from the classical works of the masters to progressive jazz, to American folk music.

Students are similarly sensitive to and appreciative of other art forms, such as modern painting, three dimensional metal sculpturing, poetry, and drama. It is not difficult to get fifty students together for an evening of reading and interpretation of a new play.

It is most interesting also that for several years there has been an increasing number of students studying religion and philosophy, on both a credit and noncredit basis. The number attending church services has increased significantly in a ten-year period.

What all of this means is that the materialism of today's student must be seen in proper perspective. To say he is a materialist is not to say he has no appreciation for things aesthetic or spiritual. Rather, it is to say that he sees material security and technological efficiency as basic to all else; as the precondition on which aesthetic and spiritual experience are possible and meaningful. It is to say also that when faced with the necessity of dis-

criminating choice, he will with little hesitation choose material values over the aesthetic and spiritual. Finally, to speak of the student as a materialist is to say that he has lost the capacity to understand the past, present, and future of mankind in their spiritual dimensions.

A second characteristic of the contemporary university student is an extreme relativism and deep uncertainty in ethical conviction. We have noted earlier that one major expression of the total revolution which affects us all is a loss of direction in personal and social morality. This condition is clearly reflected in the university student. His materialistic orientation both contributes to and is strengthened by his ethical relativism.

Expressions of ethical confusion are several-fold. One of these is the rapid increase in problem-drinking. There is scarcely a campus, even among those which have traditionally discouraged and prohibited drinking, where this is not a growing problem. In many cases it is much more than occasional adolescent-like "sprees" that can be handled by a reprimand from the dean. The problem is that a growing number of students regularly drink sufficiently to create serious academic and moral problems.

There is also a revolution on campus in sex morals. Premarital sex relations are known to be on the increase generally, and it is true of university students also. Both students and college officials who know report that sexual intimacy has become so widespread as to be accepted casually in many quarters. Just how much such intimacy can be described as promiscuous is a matter for speculation. Be that as it may, students more and more tend to form semi-permanent attachments, which exclude general dating, and in which one man and one girl see each other almost constantly. Many of these attachments lead quite naturally to overt sexual expression, but often do not result in marriage. The fact that they are not necessarily permanent and that they lack the psy-

chological, social, ethical, and religious sanctions of marriage creates problems of serious proportions.

Perhaps even more disturbing is a measurable increase in homosexuality, among both sexes.

One further evidence of moral shift and uncertainty among students is the present extent of cheating in course work and student attitudes toward it. This kind of dishonesty finds many expressions, ranging from plagiarism in theme writing, to cheating in examinations, to various other forms of misrepresentation and avoidance of honest study and scholarly production. Students generally profess to disapprove of all these practices, but if pressed often rationalize them "under certain circumstances." Those who try to be scrupulously honest personally are only mildly critical of those who are not, and try not see or know about various forms of dishonesty. Significantly, honor systems, which usually require students to take initiative against violators, are breaking down in more and more institutions because students simply will not assume such responsibility. The problem of academic dishonesty is so widespread and pernicious that it now threatens the integrity of the whole procedure in higher education. Informed educators from every type of institution are seriously alarmed.

Today's student is not only basically a materialist, enmeshed in moral relativism and confusion; he is also disillusioned about mankind and tends to doubt that there is really any meaning in life. Following, I quote one student at some length to illustrate this outlook. He is more articulate and skillful in expression than many students might be, but what he says is what a large number would say if they possessed the ability:

Have you ever wondered why students, when they have nothing else to do, get in their cars and just drive around town—nowhere to go, aimless driving; going up and down streets which they have gone up and down hundreds of times before? We are also a detached generation. Our ingrained suspicion

leads us to accept nothing which is not a sure bet. There are no bandwagons in our generation except carefully selected in-group fraternity ones. We have all the attributes of a Las Vegas bookie—detached, sure of ourselves because we don't bet unless the odds are heavily in our favor. The word risk is not a part of our make-up. We have dropped it from our vocabulary. This is not necessarily bad. We will not follow every false prophet with a convincing line. When we do commit ourselves, it will be a worth-while cause. Like the wise old trout, we are not fooled by artificial bait. Yet, even the wise old trout must eat sometime, or he too, will die.

Various studies show that we are religious, that we admit religion will play an important part in our lives. Yet, religion is no longer the center pole of the tent. It is just another guy-line holding the tent in place. It is like the social organization, the pre-med society. It is a means of identification but not the means. Materially, we are a self-satisfied generation. We have not experienced suffering in our suburbia. We are better educated, clothed and cared for than any other generation. A mule, more powerful than either a horse or a donkey, cannot reproduce itself. Our generation in which conditions are ideal for great advances may be too self-satisfied. Various polls show students were overwhelmingly Republican in this past election. Admitting some may have thought Nixon better than Kennedy, we may also wonder if it is a reflection of the extreme conservatism of our generation . . .

Teachers and parents and faculty and ministers and newspaper editors have the mission of not leaving us in peace. We are not grateful enough, responsible enough, ambitious enough, individualistic enough, not serious enough. We are silent and delinquent, and inscrutable and we don't care a used cigarette filter about world conditions or citizenship or morality or democracy or organized religion. In other words, we are not like you. You are damned right, we are not. You did not shape us in your image. You made us what you would have liked to be and now, you are not satisfied. I'm sorry, we are sorry. Oh, we recognize that our experience has been limited. We have never lived in the woods; we have never had to trudge to town and, as first-class, red carpet, we jet top-flight through youth, and we regret a little . . .

But, I would address myself to the older generation in this manner. We never asked to be so lucky. We did not vote to be born where we were. We were not polled at conception on our environmental preferences. If it gives you a large charge to take out on us your envy, proceed. You cannot hurt us. In our transcendental way, we are tyros royally content. We are as remote, as hermitic, as untouchable, really, as a woman eight months along. The world can go to hell in a basket for all she cares. She will have her baby—we will have ours.<sup>1</sup>

As the paragraphs above clearly indicate, today's students are also deeply wistful. They do not like themselves as they are. Disillusioned, practical materialists though they are, many of them still hope against hope that they are wrong in all this. Many deeply want to be able to put spiritual values above material. They want to believe that men can be motivated by genuinely unfeigned devotion to the service of mankind. They want to believe that some persons have the dignity to be individuals and the courage to stand for causes which might entail poor public relations. They want to believe that there is somehow a Right which can stand on its own feet, in devotion to which they can escape the guilt feelings their moral confusion is producing. They want, ultimately, to believe that God lives and that the true meaning of human life must take account of God's love and integrity.

Those who are doing something constructive about this kind of longing are in the minority, but they do exist. It is highly significant that during the Easter weekend vacation of 1961, when there was so much in the newspapers about the thousands of students who converged on Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, purportedly in quest of the thrill of unfettered sensuality, there were approximately 400, largely unheralded, who traveled to Washington, D. C. This latter group had come under the sponsorship

1. From an address delivered by Kaneaster Hodges, then student president of the Methodist Student Movement, November, 1960, to a meeting of College and University Ministers of the Methodist Church.



of the National Student Association to spend the weekend gathering facts about the Peace Corps. In this there is a meaningful symbolism. The fact is that a very large number of students went to Ft. Lauderdale primarily out of curiosity, seeking to know what it was like since it had received so much publicity, and wondering if they personally would have the desire or the abandon to behave as popular expectation would have it. Many did not have either the desire or the abandon, and were along just for the ride, seeking they knew not what, and finding very little. The much smaller group which assembled in Washington to explore the Peace Corps came much closer to finding the kind of satisfaction thousands were seeking. Regardless of the ultimate significance of the Peace Corps, there is ground for hope in the fact that there is yet a vigorous minority of students who are attracted by a challenge to altruistic service on subsistence wages. Certainly the large proportion of students and university faculty members subsequently involved in the Peace Corps has sustained that hope.

The wistfulness of the university student is basis for hope that he will hear with understanding the Christian witness when it is offered straight-forwardly and in relevance to the real issues of life.

### *Teachers*

The second largest group of persons on a university campus are the members of the faculty. Basic to an understanding of the university teacher is an appreciation of the ideal of scholarship to which he aspires and by which he judges himself. There are few indeed who remain in teaching who do not believe their profession is one of the most noble into which man may enter. He regards ignorance and intellectual incompetence as among man's greatest enemies, and believes therefore that dissemination of information, stimulation of ideas, and development of the capacity for mature wisdom are the prerequisites for personal fulfilment and cultural

progress. He believes the university exists to contribute to these needs, and that it must be free both from exterior pressures and from internal digressions if it is to do so. He sets a high standard of excellence in personal scholarship for himself, at least at the beginning of his career. If he fails to maintain that standard it becomes a frustration for which there is no substitute, and which distorts his total personality.

Issuing from his ideal of scholarship is a high regard for the capacity to think critically. This he undertakes to do both in his field of special competence and in all matters in which he is called upon to make some judgment or decision. Persons not familiar with the academic community sometimes find university teachers odd or difficult because of this predisposition to critical analysis.

Because the university teacher is by training and experience a specialist, his ability to think critically in other fields may be very limited. Not only does the specialist often lack information outside his field; he may, even more seriously, fall prey to the tendency to depend upon methods which are appropriate to his specialization but useless or even misleading in dealing with certain other questions. The classic example of the fallacy of specialization is the scientist who rejects religious faith because he does not find scientifically satisfactory evidence for the existence of God. It will avail nothing to exhort the trained scholar to be less critical, whether the topic under discussion is Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy or the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. All that is possible or even appropriate is to call attention to the widely varying types of evidence and the proper form criticism may take in different kinds of questions.

Turning toward another characteristic of the university teacher, we find that today he is likely to be more liberal in political, social, economic, ideological, and racial questions than the majority of his students. It is not entirely clear why this is so, though a part of the reason may be that he was an undergraduate when liberalism in all

matters was the prevailing attitude in American universities. Further, his trust in the dependability of reason and the perfectability of man were among the factors which led him to the teaching field in the first place. It is not surprising that these convictions should be reflected in his attitudes on the most important problems of life.

What has been said thus far would seem to indicate that the university professor is particularly not a materialist. However, the facts here are confusing. True, he places scholarship and the critical spirit high in his scale of values. Further, he chose a professional field whose financial rewards are lower than those of any other occupation requiring equivalent time, effort, and expense in preparation. Often he buys books or experimental equipment rather than clothes or cars. But there are other observations of which to take account. There is among faculty members general and widespread resentment because university administrative officials are usually higher paid. Often there is jealousy and resentment over relatively minor salary differences between teachers of the same academic rank. Despite the fact that some faculty members have much to say to their students about refusing substantially higher salary offers to go elsewhere, those who actually do reject really attractive financial advancements to stay at a task believed to be intrinsically worthwhile are few (though, fortunately, there yet are some who do). The very fact that some teachers have so much to say about being underpaid (as the majority certainly are) and appear to feel so put upon because of this condition raises some question as to just what place money and what it stands for hold in their scale of values.

There is another set of factors of which we must be aware if we are to understand the university professor. These arise from his participation in family and community life. Because of them he is a more complete person. Life is richer and deeper than research and critical

scholarship. Even teaching, while it brings the professor into relationship with persons and their problems, still fails to afford the rounded interpersonal experience all persons need. Family life and participation in the broader nonacademic community are therefore of great value to the teacher as a person, and to a significant degree help him to be a more perceptive and effective teacher. They are also diversionary and may involve him in disturbing conflicts of interest.

Into the teacher's family babies are born, with all this requires in time and emotional and psychological adjustment. Children must be cared for, trained, transported, entertained. New responsibilities, moral, spiritual, and economic, must be assumed.

The family participates in the community church and its activities. The teacher joins a civic club, serves on the community chest committee, becomes concerned about good city government. The list of family and community involvements is extensive, and well enough known that there is no need to spell it out in greater detail here. The important fact in our attempt to understand the university teacher is that the effect upon him of all this is to make him something different from the single-minded scholar and wholly objective teacher we might otherwise imagine him to be. For instance, even though he may have theoretical reservations about religion in general and the Christian church in particular, he is likely to feel a responsibility about religious training for his children, and thus go with his family into the church. The economic responsibilities he must assume may place a ceiling on the amount of post-doctoral training he can take, or even thwart achievement of the doctorate. Because he becomes a part of the community, accepts its established patterns, comes to know many of his fellow citizens as friends, his ability to be detached and objective about this very important area of his life may decline sharply. Soon he may find himself holding a set of convictions and exercising a critical spirit in his professional

work at the university which are contradicted by the practical standards and attitudes he adopts off campus. He may become a curiously self-contradictory individual.

Finally, in describing our composite university teacher, let us take note of what may happen to his intellectual life over a period of years. He may be fortunate enough to be a member of a faculty in which there is much interest in and much opportunity for the exchange of scholarly information across department lines, intellectual conversation in which ideas are introduced and tested in the fire of searching criticism, and students whose achievement inspires the teacher to keep abreast of the best scholarship in his field. The chances are, however, that none of these things will be true. His colleagues may be too busy or too insecure to welcome genuinely critical exchanges. His students may never really awaken and challenge him after he has taught his courses three or four times. His family and nonacademic friends are likely not to be prepared to stimulate him intellectually, and at any rate will be interested in him mostly on other levels. Almost certainly he will lack personal means to afford periodic refresher study, research, or travel, and the institution where he teaches may have no system for making this possible. He may not find the time to do research and writing. Oddly enough, the university teacher may suffer from a deep intellectual loneliness and an unsatisfied need for scholarly renewal.

### *Administrators*

There is a third group of persons belonging to the academic community. These are the administrators. The university administrator, in the contemporary meaning of that term, is a relatively latecomer to the university community and is still looked upon by some of the less democratic faculty members as an outlander and an intruder. In the European university tradition, and for a considerable period in America, the faculty was the real governing body in all matters except property management

and the more complicated financial affairs. For a long period of time such administrative tasks as were necessary were handled by persons who were essentially senior faculty members. During the last half of the nineteenth century and extending until now problems of internal administration, business management, financial solicitation, and public relations have grown to such proportions and have become so complicated that every educational institution, however small, has found it necessary to expand its administrative staff. Many on these staffs have no direct relation to the teaching program and no qualifications for teaching. The work they do, while desperately essential in making education possible, often has nothing to do with education as such, which is the principal business of the university.

Some administrators, especially academic deans, are yet drawn from the teaching ranks. Student personnel directors, recruiters, registrars, athletic staff members may or may not have teaching qualifications and experience. Presidents are recruited principally from three sources—faculties, the ministry, previous administrative responsibilities. A large number of additional administrative people, such as development and finance officers, plant managers, public relations directors, alumni secretaries, almost never are qualified to teach, nor do they have any regular and direct contact with those who do.

Because administrators often control funds and make decisions which affect those who teach and the educational program itself, while often themselves having no qualifications as educators, some problems arise in their relations with the teaching faculty. Even academic deans, almost always former teachers themselves, are suspect because they are with the administrators. The fact that as a group administrators work on a higher pay scale than do teachers does not lessen this problem. All of these circumstances also have effects upon administrative staff people. They may feel the limitations which their unfamiliarity with higher education places upon them.

They may be disturbed by the typical faculty attitude toward administrators. They often have difficulty understanding both students and faculty, and do not comprehend why faculties may react so violently when faculty prerogatives are believed to be tampered with. Administrative staff people who do understand faculties and education may feel under constant tension between their devotion on the one hand to academic integrity, and on the other hand to realities of promoting and financing an institution. Sometimes it is the university president and his staff who have to resist tremendous pressures toward action or acquiescence which would rob the institution of its freedom and its integrity. Success in such efforts, commendable though it is, will not exempt them from faculty pressures for better equipment, more teachers and higher pay.

Within the university community administrative staff people tend to be lonely persons. Those who must make administrative decisions know the loneliness that always attaches to such responsibility. Those in the lower echelons know the loneliness of being neither student nor teacher in an enterprise whose reason for existence is education.

### *University Employees*

There is yet a fourth group of persons who are even more "in the university but not of it" than the administrators. These are the maintenance people, the grounds and transportation men, the dietitians and cooks, the house mothers, the maids, etc. They may not be particularly different working in these jobs for the university than working in similar jobs elsewhere. Nevertheless, in our description of the university neither their presence nor the essentiality of their contribution should be overlooked. Certainly when the university takes account of its own constituency and the extent of its responsibility to persons these hewers of wood and drawers of water should be remembered.



Two additional facts about the university profoundly affect the persons within it and create problems for the university in the achievement of its purpose. The first of these is the increasing depersonalization and discontinuity of the university community. Sheer size, if nothing else, would make for depersonalization, as enrolments of between 15,000 and 25,000 are on the increase. But added to size is specialization with its resulting isolation of work and interest. A further factor making for depersonalization is the progressive increase of mass testing and "counseling" procedures in which the student tends to be less and less an individual mind to be developed, more and more a unit whose card is periodically run in the I.B.M. machines. Far from being "a community of scholars and teachers," a condition essential to its intellectual purposes, the university tends to become a city of strangers fulfilling impersonal requirements for degrees.

A second fact to look at in this connection is the heavy load of responsibility which all who are a part of the university must assume. On the one hand, there is the knowledge that crises become ever more serious and the threat of atomic annihilation ever more real despite the efforts (or even, sometimes because of the efforts) of trained and technically competent persons. When added to this is the knowledge that the peace and health of mankind in the future depend upon the competence and integrity of persons trained in the universities, the burden of responsibility becomes next to unbearable. The university knows it cannot within its own strength meet the demands that are placed upon it.

Of such, in part, at least, is the nature of the university and of the persons who constitute it. Though the searching light of analysis may cast in glaring outline the weaknesses and limitations of the academic community, it is yet mankind's most hopeful effort to mobilize wisdom, knowledge, and skill in dealing with human problems. The university is destined to assume increasing importance in social and personal life. We turn now to a con-

sideration of what the witness of the Christian church has to contribute to the needs of the university.

## II

### **What the Church Has to Give to the University**

When the church is indeed a community of reconciliation, that is, when it *is* the church, the contributions it has to make to the university are of immeasurable worth.

1. For one thing, there is a recovery of the sense of vocation—of divine calling—in scholarship.<sup>2</sup> The church can help the academic community to feel the claim of God upon its laboratories, its libraries, its scholars, and its students. God calls the university to special responsibility today. There is rightly no secular education. All scholarship and skill are God's.

2. With the recovery of the sense of calling will come a new motivation and a revitalized integrity in scholarship. To act with a conviction of God's presence is to act with urgency and to reject as unworthy all shoddiness and artificiality. This is at once the only adequate antidote both for cheating among students and superficial preparation among faculty.

3. The broadening of the scope of the educational enterprise is now possible, since persistent human problems may be seen in new dimension—the divine-human dimension. The Christian affirmation offers new hypotheses regarding meaning and significance. It offers new categories for taking hold of complex problems—categories such as sin, repentance, forgiveness, incarnation, grace, compassion, and redemption.

4. A further gift of the church may be an effective safeguard against the false security of specialized knowledge.

2. Portions of this section have appeared in two of my previous articles: "Academic Community and Christian Community," RELIGION IN LIFE, Spring, 1960; and "The Scholar and the Life of the Church," RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, September-October, 1961. Appreciation is extended to the publishers of each journal for permission to include these passages here.

Paradoxically, the very quest for truth may become a refuge to which one flees when fact becomes too difficult or unbearable. Man is forever building false securities around himself, to shield himself from confrontation with unpleasant reality, even to shield himself from confrontation with God, the only ultimate answer to the needs which propel him. For the academic specialist, his specialization may be that false refuge. It is very easy to feel in command of all the problems if one limits one's perspective to those questions in which one has specialized training. But when the Christian witness becomes effective in one's own life, a witness in which man is seen as eternally restless and insecure until he finds his rest and security in courageous dedication of himself to God, the artificial security created by immersion in one's specialty is dissipated.

The search for truth may not only be a false refuge from the realities of life; it may become idolatrous. Truth for its own sake is no more worthy of worship than is any other false God. Only the God who creates and teaches and calls man to judgment and gives himself in love for man's waywardness is worthy of worship. And only that truth which is held in humility and which increases one's sense of responsibility to persons in society under God is worthy of quest. All other claims to truth and all other search for truth is potentially destructive.

In Aldous Huxley's *APE AND ESSENCE*, which was cited in Chapter Two, there is another "flashback" which emphasizes the danger of deifying "objective truth":

All of the world is drawn up in two vast, utterly powerful and opposing armies. The armies differ only in the shades of their uniforms. There seems to be no essential difference in their size or power. There are no principles at stake. Each side simply has felt that it must prepare for total destruction as a means of protection against the other side, its potential enemy. As one looks more closely one sees that each general staff is a group of baboons in uniform. Each has its own Einstein squatting with a

leash around his neck. At some imperceptible signal each forces its Einstein to pull the levers and turn the wheels that release atomic and nuclear destruction upon all the earth. There is a brief period of explosion and fire and screaming, then all is still. The sky is lightened with a salmon-colored, eerie light, and pillars of smoke ascend. Standing erect here and there are parts of trees, nothing more. All the cities built through the ages of human history are desolate.

The baboons are all dead. Horribly disfigured by burns, the two Einsteins lie side by side under what remains of a flowering apple tree. Not far off a pressure tank is still oozing its Improved Glanders.

FIRST EINSTEIN

It's unjust, it isn't right . . .

SECOND EINSTEIN

We, who never did any harm to anybody;

FIRST EINSTEIN

We, who lived only for Truth.

NARRATOR

And that precisely is why you are dying in the murderous service of baboons. Pascal explained it all more than three hundred years ago. "We make an idol of truth; for truth without charity is not God, but his image and idol, which we must neither love nor worship." You lived for the worship of an idol. But, in the last analysis, the name of every idol is Moloch. So here you are, my friends, here you are.<sup>3</sup>

5. The church may, as George A. Buttrick says with such insight, bring also to the university the gifts of faith, hope, and love. Dr. Buttrick writes:

The faith that the cosmos is one and worthy of study . . . the faith that time is not a treadmill fate, but a straight line

3. Aldous Huxley, *APE AND ESSENCE*, 53. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948.

of purposeful change, faith that things are not merely things but hieroglyphs . . . faith that the body is precious . . . The paramount gift of faith is a realistic faith in God . . . Hope of redemption for education's failure . . . Hope is the confrontation of death. The word death here not only covers every scholar's death but the presumptive death of all life on the planet Earth . . .

"And the greatest of these is love" . . . The word college loses its original meaning, for in many an instance it is no longer a group of colleagues older and younger intent on wisdom: It more resembles a series of atomized departments, each department being seamed by academic rivalries. Meanwhile the student secretly asks if the professor cares about him, for he may seem to care as little as Jove on Mount Olympus; and the lonely professor asks if the student cares about him, though academic aloofness allows him no such admission. How does love spread? By a shared devotion to light and love above our human ways, not by any platform exhortations to brotherhood or by any whipped-up sentiment. If we trust that we are accepted of God's love, we can accept one another in the same love. We can accept even ourselves.<sup>4</sup>

6. Such faith, such hope and such love can raise new horizons about the scholarly task and endow the entire enterprise with transcendent meaning. Here the church has to give to the university a gift without which its task must sooner or later become not only thankless but meaningless. This condition is sharpened by the fact that we live in a time when, except as the scholar can contribute to technological achievement or economic prosperity, he is regarded as a visionary who has no important meaning to give to the workaday world of realistic and practical persons. As the scholar struggles against the perversity of the immature mind and against the vast waves of invincible ignorance which every year descend upon college and university campuses, he must believe that his task has meaning and will pay rewards

4. George A. Buttrick, *BIBLICAL THOUGHT AND THE SECULAR UNIVERSITY*, 56-62. Baton Rouge, La.: State University Press, 1960.

beyond those which he can see in any immediate product. He must believe that he is dealing with values that have real worth. When one lives and moves and labors with a sense of divine calling, when one believes that the task of scholarship and teaching may become an instrument in the purposes of God, one may then believe that he is not merely engaged in conveying scraps of information to resistant and none-too-capable minds; rather, one may believe that he is engaged with God in the task of preparing eternal souls for their struggle to become whole.

### III

#### **The Active Witness of the Church in the Academic Community**

The witness of the church to the academic community is not merely a matter of rhetoric. The gifts described in the foregoing section become realities not so much in the making of speeches or the writing of essays as in the way daily life together is lived. What are the channels through which the Christian church can make its witness in the academic community?

1. First, there is the witness of study and teaching. For the teacher this means doing what any good teacher does in honest scholarship and through teaching, but doing it for a different reason. Yet it means more than this. It means understanding the transcendent purposes of education. It means openness to the possibility of a divine-human dimension to truth in determining what questions are relevant and what data are to be investigated. It means participating with other faculty members in the building of a curriculum that brings the student into confrontation with the persistent problems of life and death and purpose to which the great religions of man speak.<sup>5</sup>

5. I have developed these ideas somewhat further in an article entitled, "On Being a Christian Teacher," *THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR*, June, 1957.

This is no easy matter in the contemporary university, because in many cases it will mean being labeled a heretic by one's academic colleagues. Indeed, openness to the possibility of a divine-human dimension is heretical in some academic circles. Such openness is heretical because it opposes the philosophical naturalism which has become the orthodoxy of many university departments. The metaphysical preconceptions of naturalism are such that to even take seriously the possibility of God's existence is to discuss a meaningless question. In some quarters this naturalistic orthodoxy is as intolerant as any theological orthodoxy ever was, and as vicious in spirit in its persecution of academic heretics.

For the student the witness in study means hard, regular, and honest scholarly toil as a calling under God. It means turning one's back on all short-cuts. Certainly it means refusal to employ any form of academic dishonesty, no matter how intense or important the competition in which one is engaged. It means openness to the best the university has to offer. It means development of the capacity for scholarly criticism and independent creativity. If the Christian is to witness effectively in the academic community he must never be guilty of substituting piety for scholarship, nor engaging in "religious activities" while he is doing less than his best in his studies. To be an honest scholar under God is the foundation on which an effective witness in this community must be established.

The distractions of campus life are many, and sometimes even the best resolutions to achieve a more excellent scholarship result only in new failures. Here the church may be of tangible assistance when its members on campus constitute a genuine community. The Christian community can strengthen its members in scholarly resolve and can afford them instruction and tutorial assistance. The church on campus should be genuinely a community of scholarship. On some campuses students have in recent years entered into somewhat formal dis-



ciplines of prayer, study, and scholarly effort in an attempt better to fulfil their vocation as students. Such experiments are worth following carefully with a view to estimating their potential worth as guides for the church on other campuses.

2. A second major channel for the Christian witness is the counseling relationship between teacher and student. The successful counselor must begin with a thorough understanding of himself and move on to an understanding of students as they really are. He must understand what counseling is and how it is accomplished. Particularly, he must know that good counseling is not advice-giving. No would-be counselor ever solves another's problems, and the perceptive counselor does not profess to. There are no short-cuts, and no development on the part of him who is counseled until openness on the one-hand and non-judgmental acceptance on the other hand are established. This is why most so-called "academic counseling" degenerates into guidance toward fulfilment of graduation requirements.

There is no greater need in the university than genuinely helpful counseling. The church is by nature equipped to fulfil this need. It is a community of love, a permissive brotherhood, in which all persons are accepted as they are, on faith in what they may become. The church can establish a context of acceptance in which defenses can safely be abandoned and the individual can be honest with himself and let those whom he trusts see him as he is. Looking squarely at his fears and understanding the real nature of his negativism, the person in need may divest himself of them. This often frees him to look toward an ideal image of what he may be and mobilize his forces to work for that ideal. Seldom if ever can an individual bring about this kind of change for himself. He requires one or more understanding confidants who can sustain him and give him the courage to look at himself at his worst and his best.

All this the church can do; so can other communities

and individuals. But the counseling of the church can be richer still because of its more profound understanding of man's need and of divine resources available to him. Thus beyond helping the person to let go of his negativism and mobilize the power within him, the church can be an instrument of reconciliation with God, within whose love we all are made whole.

3. The Christian witness can be made also in campus social life. There are several levels at which this witness may find expression. One of these is the organized social event or party. Both as a responsible member of campus social organizations and as a participant in social events the Christian must differentiate between good taste and bad, between what truly makes for satisfying social experience and what destroys, what is worthy of the participation of mature persons and what by its very nature cheapens them.

The Christian community can render a genuine service to campus social life by drawing a clear distinction between reasonable expenditures and self-indulgent excesses for social events. I well remember one occasion a few years ago in which the student association of a small college spent \$1,000 for a "name band" for an all-school party, to say nothing of hundreds of dollars more that were spent on flowers, corsages, evening gowns, refreshments, etc.; and in the same year this same campus was able to raise only \$180 for World University Service.

Another expression of the Christian witness within campus social organizations can be made in relation to rushing practices, bases for selecting or excluding students seeking membership, and attitudes toward members of other groups or "independents." A plan of rushing which focuses undue attention on social organizations, creating desire and expectation of membership on the part of many only to disappoint a large number for superficial reasons, often does serious damage to the personalities of some who make the grade as well

as of many who do not. Any social organization which discriminates against persons on the basis of generalizations such as race, religious belief, or national origin, without reference to the merits of persons within the excluded groups is archaic in concept and detrimental in social effects. Regarding these matters the church must be sensitive and articulate.

This is not to say that social organizations have no contribution to make to campus life. Neither is it to say that all bases of selecting members are unjustifiable. However, if such groups are to be constructive they must do much more than sing about brotherhood and memorize lofty speeches to be repeated by candlelight. They must begin with an honest concern to know what their legitimate role in the life of the university is. They must then invest serious effort to be genuine living fellowships in which students have an opportunity to grow through association with various kinds of persons.

The church cannot be relevant to organized campus social life by gathering its members unto itself, thus becoming an additional social unit characterized by its own kind of exclusivism. Those members of the Christian community who feel moved to do so should join the social organizations and make their witness from within. The danger, of course, is that always faced by the infiltrator—that he will be intimidated by or converted to the deeply entrenched status quo.

Still another level on which the Christian witness in social life can be made is in individual relationships, especially between the sexes. Whether in college or out, the only corrective for unwholesome patterns and practices between the sexes is deeper understanding, respect for persons—including oneself—acceptance of responsibility, and growth of the capacity to differentiate between lust and love. This is not a matter in which preaching can help nearly so much as a group of students who accept for themselves and strive to maintain a standard of mature responsibility.

4. A fourth channel through which the church may fulfil its calling in the university is in the development of significant and relevant religious activities. It is a matter of great encouragement to know student religious organizations are becoming increasingly mature. While there are exceptions, generally speaking the popular stereotype of such organizations as semi-social, semi-religious substitute satisfactions for lonely students who are passed over by fraternities and other campus activities is utterly inaccurate. Rather, student religious organizations are characterized by serious study of the major problems of our time, depth of concern about such campus patterns as have been described above, and effective organized action in areas open to student action.

It is uncertain whether the total number of students "reached" by campus religious organizations is proportionately greater or smaller than a generation ago. Changing patterns in the life and function of student religious activity have led some observers to jump to the conclusion that many fewer are involved than was true fifteen years ago. There is reason to believe that just the reverse is true. Be that as it may, campus religious organizations are successfully challenging an increasing number of the most capable, attractive, and serious-minded students. Indeed, one of the major grounds for hope that some future leaders of our culture will be broadly educated, sensitive, and religiously motivated persons is the quality, maturity, and vigor of these groups.

Campus religious organizations at their best now have some of the following characteristics:

- a) Study of the scriptures and the Christian heritage.
- b) Deepened theological understanding of history and of the present.
- c) Appreciation of the arts and growing interest in the expression of Christian insight through the arts.
- d) Sharp sensitivity to major social, political, and international problems, especially in their entailment of responsibility for Christians.

- e) A resurgent willingness to become "involved" and to take risks where they believe responsibility calls.
- f) A developing resistance to the materialistic orientation of life and a growing interest in recovery of spiritual foundations.
- g) Concern that the church recover its prophetic voice, break off its enfeebling identification with the existing order, and free itself from archaic bureaucracy within.

Such characteristics are expressing themselves in the development of non-credit study programs, research sometimes involving travel and extensive interviewing, social service or work projects at home and abroad, appearances before official church bodies or educational or legislative committees, the formation of communities of "faith and learning," and in many other ways. Such activities are often demanding in time, effort, and money, drawing upon highest abilities, and are in no wise attractive to students who have only superficial interest in religion.

5. The last expression of the witness of the church within the university at which we shall look is nurture of its own life. If the church is to have strength to fulfil its calling it must be a genuinely identifiable community within which its members find regular reawakening, loving correction, and reassurance. A community can exist only around a common experience or concern; this is the very root meaning of the word. The common experience and concern of the church is the love of God made manifest in life. Throughout all its life the church has shared this concern through prayer, study of the scriptures, preaching, receiving the sacraments, and reaffirmation of the major tenets of its faith. The church in the university is in no less need of these "means of grace" than was the church in other times and places. The strength and relevance of the witness of the church through the whole of the university will be in large

part dependent upon the vigor of the church as a Christian community.

The daily life of a Christian community which gives regular attention to the nurture of its own members becomes a form of witness in itself. Those outside will test it by its capacity to be relevant to the purposes of the university and to help its members carry the witness of the church into the whole of campus life. If in the nurture of its own members the church passes this test it will attract unto itself many others who know their own need for what such a community has to offer.

Before leaving this discussion of the witness of the church in the university, let us make explicit one perspective that has been implicit throughout the chapter. If the witness of the church is to be relevant to the university the church must exist within the university. It is a grave error to think of the church as established outside the university, reaching somehow into the secular educational institution and attempting to rescue some and "bring them back" to the church. Many "missions to the university" and similar efforts by the churches have failed utterly because they were essentially foraging expeditions into the campus by groups of well intentioned persons who had no witness to make to those engaged in the educational enterprise.

The university is deeply involved in work that is worthy of the calling of Christians, and many Christians, both students and teachers, are engaged in it. Those who submit themselves to the discipline of scholarship, who value intellectual integrity, who regard ideas as important, and who are willing to accept the toil that is basic to the search for truth can speak relevantly to the university because they speak as part of it. It is from among these that the church within the university must be assembled and it is through these that the witness of the church must be made.

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SOME OF MY BEST FRIENDS ARE PROFESSORS.  
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## The Relevance of the Church: The Christian Witness Confronts Dialectical Materialism

ON A HOT summer afternoon fifty or sixty university students and several professors sat and talked in a pavilion at the International Student Camp at Sochi on the Black Sea. Approximately half the students were Americans, the remainder divided among Russians, Poles, Czechs and East Germans. This was a somewhat formally structured discussion of many questions which students from Communist Bloc countries and from America had to ask one another.

One of the American professors had for several minutes been pressing the Communist students with questions about their reasons for rejecting belief in God, with almost wholly unsatisfactory results. Finally, with a considerable show of impatience one of the Russian students said in effect, "We do not want to talk about religion any more because the subject is both uninteresting and unimportant. Religion may be all right for those who want it, but for us it does not matter at all and we prefer to discuss some other topic." The entire reason for this breaking off of the discussion of religion was not clear. It is possible that the Communist students realized they were getting the worst of the discussion and were embarrassed by their lack of competence in this field. Also, however, many doubtless have been convinced that religion is in truth an unimportant vestige of bourgeois society.

At any rate, there was much agreement and head nodding among fellow Communist students.

In some ways this attitude toward religion holds greater danger to the witness of the church in the U.S.S.R. than does militant and aggressive atheism. It is more dangerous because it regards both organized religious communities and the questions to which religion attempts to speak as irrelevant, not worthy of serious discussion nor significant enough to attack. Now while it is quite true that religious concern and devotion are alive and widespread in Russia after forty-five years of aggressive opposition, the young future leaders as represented by the students at Sochi seldom regard the church as an important factor to be reckoned with in the shaping of the future of the U.S.S.R. Wherever the basic assumptions regarding meaning, value, and destiny derive from the philosophy of dialectical materialism, the church faces a mammoth task of reestablishing and demonstrating the relevance of the witness to the realities of life.

## I

### **The Ideological Atheism of Dialectical Materialism**

Dialectical materialism is atheistic of necessity because it is a form of materialism. As was noted in Chapter Seven, within any materialistic philosophy reality is understood as basically composed of matter, or energy, best described by the physical and biological sciences. Within this body of presuppositions there is no place for a nonmaterial God, certainly not for the God of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. If for no other reason, then, atheism is a natural and unavoidable corollary of the philosophy of dialectical materialism.

Marx had written:

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feelings of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of unspiritual conditions. It is the opium of the people . . .

The people cannot be really happy until it has been deprived

of illusory happiness by the abolition of religion. The demand that the people should shake itself free of illusion as to its own condition is the demand that it should abandon a condition which needs illusion.<sup>1</sup>

And Friedrich Engels wrote:

Now all religion is nothing else than the fantastic reflex in the minds of men of those external forces which dominate their every day existence, a reflection in which the earthly forces assume the form of supernatural forces.<sup>2</sup>

Lenin's opposition to all religion was nonetheless positive and complete:

God (as he appeared in history and life) is before all a complex of ideas produced by the stupefying oppression of man both by outer nature and class exploitations—a complex of ideas which strengthens this oppression and lulls the class struggle.

The religious oppression of humanity is but the product and reflex of economic oppression within society. . . .<sup>3</sup>

In the U.S.S.R., however, the attack of the Communist Party upon all theistic philosophies has been especially aggressive and often bitter. The vigor of this attack is understandable only in terms of the antagonism toward the Russian Orthodox Church in particular. The Church was looked upon as the major bulwark of czarism and of the old order in Russia. Its deep-reaching identity with Russian culture was well known. The emotional devotion of the masses of people to the church was regarded as perhaps the chief stumbling block in the effort to win popular acclaim for the new order. It was regarded as necessary to break the hold of the Church, and to justify the bitter persecution which almost immediately was launched against it. If religion could be successfully rep-

1. Karl Marx, ZURKRITIKDER HEGELSCHEN RECHTSPHILOSOPHIE.

2. Friedrich Engels, ANT-DUERING.

3. Lenin, "Socialism and Religion," COLLECTED WORKS, vol. 8, p. 422.

resented as a superstitious vestige of a primitive level of development, as simultaneously an opiate and an exploiter of the people, and as based on faulty philosophical presuppositions there appeared to be a strong chance that the Church could be undermined.

The ideological atheism of dialectical materialism within the U.S.S.R. was, therefore, implicit within the ideology. The aggressiveness with which this atheism has been propagated, however, has practical rather than ideological motivation.

## II

### **A Review of Relations Between Communism and Religion<sup>4</sup>**

As soon as the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia they undertook an aggressive campaign to destroy all religious faith. They labeled all religious communities as centers of reaction and of potential counter-revolution. Within the first five years after the October Revolution all religious property was confiscated. Houses of worship could be used for this purpose only after permission of the local Soviet had been obtained and on the payment of high taxes. All religious education of children and all training for the priesthood were forbidden.

In 1925 the League of Militant Atheists was organized and began systematic publication of many forms of propaganda, all government financed. Along with the special economic programs of the government, five-year plans of militant atheism also were launched in 1927 and 1932, respectively. One declared goal was the elimination of the name of God from the entire U.S.S.R. by 1937.

In 1926 the Central Committee of the Communist Party adopted a vigorous antireligious program. The official declarations launching this program condemned all religion and especially Christianity:

4. Much of the factual information in this section is taken from *RELIGION IN THE U.S.S.R.*, edited by Boris Ivanov. Munich: Institute for the Study of the U.S.S.R., 1960.

The struggle with religion must be carried on by exposing religious morals as a morality imposed in a special manner upon the toilers by the ruling class. (Contemporary Christianity, for example, as a system of morals, represents by itself nothing but such a concept of duty as is in the interest of the ruling exploiters. The morals proposed to the toilers by Christianity are bourgeois—exploiters' morals, training the exploited classes for all those qualities which, from the point of view of the exploiter, his victim should have: silence, passiveness, meekness, patience.) It is necessary to condemn categorically, as the worst type of popery, every effort of approachment of Christianity to Communism. Religion must be rejected for good, without reservation and camouflage. . . . It is necessary to point out the harmfulness to the class interests of the toilers of religious emotions and sentiment.<sup>5</sup>

Repressive measures against religion were enacted in 1922-23 and again in 1929-30. Through these laws religious bodies were forbidden to hold property, to teach religion, or to exercise any form of charity. Further, the R.S.F.S.R. statute dealing with secondary schools not only prohibits any form of religion but enjoins specific anti-religious instruction:

The teaching of any form of religious worship, as well as the performance of any rites or rituals of a faith, and any other form of religious influence upon the growing generation shall be prohibited and prosecuted under the criminal law.

The primary schools and secondary schools shall secure an antireligious upbringing of the students and shall build instruction and educational work upon the basis of an active fight against religion and its influence upon the student and adult population.<sup>6</sup>

These laws have never been repealed.

During the first twenty years after the Revolution thou-

5. These adopted at the Party Conference on Antireligious Propaganda and at the Central Committee of the U.S.S.R., April 27-30, 1926, Sec. V., English translation, quoted from Hecker, *RELIGION AND COMMUNISM* (1933), p. 279.

6. R.S.F.S.R. LAWS (1934), text 263.

sands of churches and monasteries were closed, thousands of priests and bishops were imprisoned, exiled, or executed. Artistic treasures and other valuable religious articles valued in the millions of rubles were confiscated. Religious books and icons were burned by wagon loads. Organized religious communities among Christians, Jews, and Moslems had largely disintegrated. Yet religious devotion was far from destroyed within the rank and file of the common people.

After the German invasion of Russia matters underwent a dramatic change. Bolshevik leaders took note of the fact that in the territories occupied by the Germans vigorous religious revivals were taking place. A new religious policy on the part of the Soviet was announced in 1941. Antireligious propaganda ceased to be produced. In 1942 the League of Militant Atheists was dissolved. THE JOURNAL OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE, which had been forced to cease publication in 1936 reappeared in 1943. A number of Orthodox Churches were reopened and the number of priests and bishops increased. In 1943 a Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, as a branch of the Council of People's Commissars, was established. In 1944 a similar council for other denominations, the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults, was opened.

Also in 1944, under Stalin's sponsorship, a Council of Bishops was held in Moscow, at which Metropolitan Sergii was elected Patriarch of Moscow and of all the Russians. He was later succeeded by Patriarch Alexsii, who along with Sergii and metropolitan Nikolai, had been called to Moscow by Stalin in 1943 to discuss the "new" religious policy.

Following the war the government purportedly continued its new policy. Slowly the Moscow patriarchate moved into a position of special favor.

Churches and theological seminaries have been reopened slowly but steadily since the war. There is increasing evidence of toleration if not approval of the

Orthodox Church. Religious sects, such as the Baptists, are permitted to function, but with none of the privileges accorded the Orthodox Church. It is not clear to what extent persecution of Moslems continues, but at most this seems not as intense as before World War II. Jews are not given the freedom accorded even the Christian sects and there are persistent reports of spreading antisemitism in official circles.

Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people attend the masses and the religious services weekly.

It is both useful and important to differentiate between the government and the Communist Party in the U.S.S.R. on the matter of religion. This is true despite the fact that there is only one party and all government officials are of course members of it. Government officials assume the responsibilities which pertain to these offices, and in theory, at least, act on behalf of national interest. Party activity (again theoretically) can be carried on without necessarily being official acts of the government.

With this in mind it is worth noting that even though government action in regard to religious bodies has changed significantly from the vigorous persecution of the 1920's and 1930's, Communist Party opposition to all religion has never been modified. Overt attacks upon religion were discontinued during the dark days of the war, but were resumed by the Party soon after the war, and have gone on systematically for the past fifteen years or so, even while government policy developed on the apparent assumption that a relaxation of restrictions and even some limited cooperation with the Church might be useful. Thus in 1954 the following paragraph appeared in PRAVDA:

The victory of the socialist ideology does not mean, however, that in our society the remnants of the bourgeois concept of life and the survival of the ideology and ethics of private owners are totally liquidated. These survivals do not and will not die out by themselves, they must be fought persistently with



full force. One of the most tenacious and harmful survivals of capitalism in the minds of people are the religious superstitions. These superstitions poison up to the present time the mind of a part of our people, (and) hinder their active participation in the building up of Communism.<sup>7</sup>

Consistently also, exhortations to parents to guard their children against the pernicious influence of religious teachers have appeared in the various Party organs. During the summer of 1962 active attacks by the Communists upon religion seemed to have tapered off. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, many Russian students appeared not to feel strongly about religion, but rather to reject it almost automatically as a dead issue. However, in September PRAVDA announced a new offensive against religion by the Communist Party with an accompanying effort to popularize atheism. Mass media and reading rooms filled with atheist literature were to be employed. As was often true in the past, religion was to be represented as a superstitious appendage of a bygone day, now completely discounted by Soviet science.

These observations strongly suggest that ideological opposition to religion will be carried on indefinitely by the Party for the sake of consistency and possibly with the hope that in the longrun even the emotional need for religion will be eradicated. In the meantime government officials, acting with practical responsibility, may hope that relaxation of restrictions against religion may help to take attention away from the spiritual barrenness of Marxism-Leninism and perhaps even bring to the support of the government some of the emotional devotion that characterizes religion. This official "freedom" of religion also presents a better propaganda face to the world.

Of all the Christian groups under Russian Soviet power the Roman Catholic Church has benefitted least by the "new policy on religion." Soviet opposition to Catholicism probably is based on the facts that the ultimate

7. PRAVDA, July 24, 1954.

authority of this church is in Rome, that the Pope and the entire Catholic Church has for centuries been deeply involved in the politics of any country in which its strength would permit such involvement. Thus today in Belorussia where Catholics numbered 2,500,000 in 1916, there were only 800,000 in 1956. Competent observers report that beginning with the reoccupation of Belorussia in 1944 the Soviet regime undertook the systematic destruction of the Roman Catholic Church, and this intent continues to be pursued vigorously. The same principle has been followed consistently relative to Catholicism throughout the U.S.S.R. However, early in 1963 there were visits by Soviet officials to the Vatican, giving rise to speculation about a possible new policy toward the Roman Church.

In two of the more important smaller nations of the Communist Bloc, Poland and Czechoslovakia, the situation has been somewhat different.

Poland is strongly Catholic, and the Church in Poland has always been strongly nationalistic. Power wielded by the Catholic hierarchy before the Communist regime was established was immense. There was an intense struggle between the regime in Poland and the Church, but this was directed against the power of the Church and not against religion as such. Poles have continued to attend the churches in great numbers.

Protestants in Poland taken collectively constitute only about 2% of the population and therefore are not likely to be a major force in Polish affairs. The government has not interfered with the religious or educational activities of the Protestants. The Protestants, on their part, have sought to be as positive as possible in their attitudes toward Marxist political and social reforms.

Czechoslovakia, while strongly Catholic in the twentieth century, also has a significant amount of Protestant influence historically. Here, too, the government opposed clericalism without an overt attack upon religion in general. The Communist Party, while moving with more subtlety in Czechoslovakia than in the U.S.S.R., has been

somewhat more active in attacking religion as such than has been true in Poland.

Protestants of Czechoslovakia have perhaps gone farther than any other religious body in accommodating themselves to the fact of a Marxist government. The most influential Protestant in all of Eastern Europe is Dr. Josef Hromadka, dean of the Comenius Theological Faculty in Prague. Dr. Hromadka believes that a Communist social and economic order is not only unavoidable in light of historic circumstances but also best for Czechoslovakia. Much that the Marxists have done in economic affairs particularly are for the good of the whole people and might well need doing under a Christian regime. He feels, therefore, that Christians should take a positive, cooperative attitude toward the government, supporting it wherever possible.

Dr. Hromadka expresses himself as further convinced that association with the U.S.S.R. and the Communist Bloc nations is both more natural and in the long-run more advantageous for Czechoslovakia than is association with the Western powers. He expresses the fervent hope that this will not be interpreted to mean that his nation should be "against" the West.

It seems clear that Dr. Hromadka and those who agree with him are not formally Marxists. They accept many Marxist social and economic goals, but differ in matters which they believe most at the heart of the Christian faith; the nature of man, the sovereignty of God, the ultimate end and meaning of human history. They believe that the church ultimately must face a crucial struggle with Marxism on such issues, but that the church will be in better position to win that struggle if it concentrates on these. The Christian may be as free in Eastern Europe now as he has the courage to be, says Dr. Hromadka. In exercising that freedom courageously he will create respect in the minds of the Communists. If the Christians have not represented themselves as obstructionists the time will come when the superficialities of

Marxist ideology will become apparent and the church may then speak the eternal Word.

Dr. Hromadka's views are highly controversial in the Western world, with many feeling he has simply become a willing collaborator with the Communists. Within the context of social and political realities of Eastern Europe, however, it is much more difficult to discount the realism and possibly the long-term wisdom of his position.

### III

#### **The Ideological Opposition to Religion in the U.S.S.R. Today**

While the Communist Party in the U.S.S.R. has never relented in its declared opposition to all religion—and indeed reasserts that opposition with vehemence from time to time—there are some suggestions that in practice at present the attack is not being prosecuted with the grim vigor that has often been evident.

It is true, of course, that the Museum of Religion and Atheism in Leningrad is still being maintained. Communist youth publications carry frequent exhortations directed both to youth and to their parents against the dangers of coming under the influence of priests and religious teachers. Atheistic education is still being carried on in the schools. Nevertheless, militant atheism does not appear to be currently a major issue, either in Party organs or in the conversation of Party members or members of the Young Communist League. An attitude of relative indifference akin to that described among the students at the beginning of this chapter appears to be most characteristic.

If the impression that the opposition to religion is less vigorously pressed just now is a correct one it may be due to one or more of several possible explanations. It would, for instance, be reasonable to expect that a government policy ranging from tolerance to modest approval of religion would inevitably be reflected in the

overt activity of the Party as well. It may be also that there are realists within the Party who, seeing the hundreds of thousands attending the masses and other religious services after forty-five years of ideological attack and brutal persecution, recognize that the campaign to destroy religious faith has failed. Even a one-party political order cannot feel secure or ever relax so long as the vast majority of the people reject, even passively, a major tenet of the party ideology. A stance of patient tolerance of the continuation of "primitive superstitions" such as religious faith would be both more comfortable and reasonably compatible with ideological atheism. Again, it is possible that many assume that the battle against religion is already won among the younger social, political, and intellectual leaders and that perpetuation of religion among factory workers and farm laborers is of no consequence. There may well be other and more complex reasons also for any lessening of the vigor of attacks on religion.

Whether intentionally lessened or not, however, the ideological opposition to religion in the U.S.S.R. is largely superficial and naive regarding the essential issues. At its best Marxism falls far short of profundity in dealing with metaphysical and theological questions. Yet the present handling of such questions in the U.S.S.R. even fails to utilize the best of what dialectical materialism as a philosophy has to offer. Typically, the approach is to equate religion with superstition and to regard all "enlightenment" as basically scientific. There is obvious ignorance of all sophisticated theology. The innocent acceptance of "science" as an infallible source of answers to every important human problem is even more potently evidence of an incapacity for serious critical philosophical thought.

During the summer of 1962 I had an opportunity to explore questions of religion with a number of university students and faculty members within the U.S.S.R. I was amazed at how often I heard quoted the statement by

one of the Russian cosmonauts that though he had circled the earth seventeen times he had not found God. This was taken to be a serious and significant piece of evidence that God could not exist! Most of the discussion was approximately on this level, with very few giving any evidence of being aware of the real issue. Few indeed understood the metaphysical grounds for atheism within the framework of dialectical materialism.

Available evidence regarding formal instruction in philosophy in Soviet universities leads to the expectation of the kind of philosophical naivete cited above. Genuine philosophical criticism (especially of Marxism-Leninism) is next to nonexistent, and there is no clear-cut line between serious philosophical study and propaganda.

#### **IV**

### **The Present and Future Significance of the Russian Orthodox Church in the U.S.S.R.**

It is no exaggeration to say that any adequate understanding of the U.S.S.R. in the present must take careful account of the vital part the Orthodox Church has played in shaping the culture of a number of the constituent republics. The Church came to Georgia early in the fourth century. Both Muscovy and the Ukraine became officially Christian in the tenth century. Byzantium emperors had been absolute rulers by divine right, and Defenders of the Faith. They were in effect heads of the church as well as of secular institutions, and the church had been regarded as an instrument of the ruler. Russian tzars assumed this same absolute, divinely established power, and the same relation to the church. In Muscovy, especially, being Christian was identical with being Russian, and the lines distinguishing the church from the state often were blurred. During the seventeenth century many important government decrees were signed jointly by Tzar Alexei and Patriarch Nikon, thus demonstrating the interrelation of church and state.

Eventually the church came under complete domination of the government, and secular authorities accepted responsibility for enforcing religious observance and orthodox belief. Isolated as it was from Western Europe, Russia developed an inbred culture in which Orthodox religious views colored by the close alliance with absolute monarchy were major factors. Nicholas P. Vakar writes:

Orthodoxy and isolation together molded a cultural unity. The Muscovite state known as Holy Russia was "a land of innumerable churches and incessant chimes, of long services, pious prostrations and severe fasts." It was a land "as uniform in . . . religious ideas as only an uncultured nation can be." A society of God's children, it was ruled by a prince, who might be stupid or cruel, but ultimately provided "the common good of all our orthodox Christendom." The prince governed with the advise of the church council . . . as well as a council of selected nobles.<sup>8</sup>

Even the dissenting religious bodies within Russia (of which there were quite a number) reflected original influences from Orthodoxy and in turn made deep impressions on their followers.

Because Orthodox Christianity had been superimposed upon pagan religions, "conversions" of whole nations often being formal rather than spiritual, religious practices, in the villages especially, often incorporated many ancient superstitions. Holy water was widely believed to have healing power, many monasteries professed to have miraculous icons, belief in the power of the "evil eye" (symbolic of the presence of Satan) was accepted by many, there were many religious holidays of pagan origin, and semi-superstitious interpretations of Christian

8. Nicholas P. Vakar, *THE TAPROOT OF SOVIET SOCIETY*, 19, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961. Internal quotations are from A. A. Komilav, *MODERN RUSSIAN HISTORY*; S. Kravchinsky (Stepanik), *THE RUSSIAN PEASANTRY: THE AGRARIAN CONDITIONS, SOCIAL LIFE, AND PEASANTRY*; and Metropolitan Iona of Moscow, as quoted by V. O. Kliuchevsky, *KURS RUSSKOI ISTORII*.

ritualistic practices were common. Both by perpetuation of superstition among the ignorant masses and by its unusually effective emotional appeal to the upper and middle classes, the Orthodox Church became deeply imbedded in the lives and practices of the people and in their unconscious minds.

The depth and indelible nature of these religious beliefs must be taken into account both in understanding the failure of Communist attack to destroy religious faith and in taking account of the present and future significance of the Russian Orthodox Church. This, combined with the fact that the Church has proved useful to the regime both in war and in political concerns, appears to place the Church in a strategic and somewhat enigmatic position in the contemporary Soviet scene.

The Russian people attend the masses of the Orthodox Church by the thousands. Tuesday and Saturday nights, Sunday mornings, and special religious holidays find the churches crowded hour after hour. For several years now most Sunday services have included a sermon by one of the priests. Through the employment of scripture, majestic liturgy, creeds, music of unearthly beauty, pageantry, dazzling chancel appointments, and incense, the masses create an almost hypnotic sense of otherworldliness. The high moment in the mass is the dramatic opening of the door in the *iconostas* through which the priests stride, chanting and carrying the elements of the Eucharist to be given to the people. To watch the people kiss the icons, kneel and touch their heads to the stone floors, cross themselves, and strain forward, often with little children to receive the communion elements, is to see people deeply devoted to their faith and profoundly moved by the service.

The very least that can be said about the present relation between the Church and the government is that the Church is not only permitted to function, but encouraged to do so. Whether the relation goes further than that in a working agreement which both find useful is a matter



much debated but about which all but a few even inside Russia must merely speculate. It is clear that the Church is permitted to utilize for its own purposes the millions of rubles collected from the vast throng of the faithful; it is stoutly denied that the government subsidizes the Church in any way. An increasing number of young men are being permitted to enter theological training leading to the priesthood, though there are some indications that as a group these are intellectually inferior persons. Churches have been permitted to reopen in increasing numbers and some are being restored to prerevolutionary splendor.

The Moscow patriarchate and others have become major centers of Church administration and Church officials have significant influence with government officials. The Church was both permitted and encouraged by the government to apply for entrance into the World Council of Churches in 1961. Metropolitan Nikolai and other officials are permitted to attend various ecclesiastical conferences. Again, the Church is permitted and encouraged to bring foreign church officials to Moscow for ecclesiastical discussions.

The Church is led by a group of men who impress one as hard-headed, astute, adroit, and highly perceptive. Most of them have grown up in Communist Russia. They have accepted on behalf of themselves and the Church a role of spiritual leadership, carefully refraining from all political, social, or economic discussion. They refrain from all criticism of the government, even accepting with apparent unconcern the prohibition against religious education for any child under eighteen years. In all references to the international situation they repeat with apparent approval the Communist Party line.

One never feels completely sure whether members of the Church hierarchy are basically devoted churchmen utilizing the present improved relation with the government for the strengthening of the Church as an institution; or whether they are first of all devoted party mem-

bers working inside the Church to bring to the Marxist order emotional satisfactions and spiritual dimensions which otherwise are lacking. Perhaps there are some in each category; perhaps some play both of these roles simultaneously. They know they are useful at this time to the government, and whatever their true motives may be, they are making the most of this situation.

Whatever else is to be thought about the Russian Orthodox Church, it is the major, perhaps the only, basis for hoping that organized Christianity can play a vital role in the present and future of the U.S.S.R. This view is not to be understood as any lack of appreciation for the various Protestant sect groups. There is no question that these are of great importance to the people who participate in them. Nevertheless the Orthodox Church is so identified with the warp and woof of Russian life that it is improbable that any other Christian group will gather a sufficient number of followers to become a major factor in the Russian cultural scene.

## V

### **Long-term Interaction Between the Christian Faith and Marxism-Leninism**

Barring a sharp reversal of present Soviet policy of a more tolerant attitude toward religion, there will be a growing interaction between religious faith on the one hand, and Marxism-Leninism on the other. And barring major war between the U.S.S.R. and Western powers, there is every indication that cultural interaction between East and West will steadily intensify. The Christian Church is likely to have increasing opportunities to participate in that cultural exchange. Further, the entrance of the Russian Orthodox Church into the World Council of Churches will certainly increase communication between Christians on either side of the iron curtain.

All of these facts strongly imply the operation of a cultural dialectic involving the Christian faith and the Marxist-Leninist ideology. One fact about a dialectic is

that neither thesis nor antithesis emerges unchanged. The resulting synthesis is a product of genuine interaction and while both thesis and antithesis are reflected in it, each has in a sense lost its life in the birth-process of the synthesis.

This is a sobering thought when applied to the developing interaction between Christians and Marxists. The church (as the community of the faithful) cannot hope to have any effect upon the Marxist culture except as it enters this dialectic. Yet it cannot enter without losing its life as it is and becoming party to a culture that reflects interaction with the Marxist-Leninist mind and culture. It may or may not be some reassurance to know that it has ever been so. Every time the faith has entered into the life of a new culture, from Corinth to America, it has to a large extent become a new faith, indigenous to and reflecting life in Corinth or America, or wherever the witness took root and grew. Yet it has, we believe, remained the same Word of reconciliation spoken by Jesus Christ.

The world Christian community should welcome the opportunity of such a dialectic, provided it can enter upon the interaction fully dedicated to the leadership of the Holy Spirit and prepared to invest itself completely in this, its most crucial struggle. How is the world Christian community to play an effective part in this dialectic? What are the conditions under which the witness of the church may be so persuasive and powerful that the emerging synthesis may be in essence a Christian basis for and pattern of life?

1. *The churches within the Communist countries must assume responsibility for whatever direct witness there is.* This is true first because the terms in which the Western churches would state the faith would be strange, sometimes misleading to Eastern ears. It is true, further, because the Western churches would be suspect in the East on political grounds. It is true yet again because only those Christians who live within Marxist lands can under-

stand fully how the witness is to be made effectively within that context. Western Christians can support their Eastern brethren with their prayers and brotherhood expressed through open channels of communication.

2. *It is essential that Western churches heed Dr. Hromadka's plea that we purge ourselves of merely "anti-attitudes."* Like it or not, communism is a fact in vast areas of the world. Our concern must be to find possible areas of reconciliation, and to be ever alert to changing conditions and possible opportunities to communicate the word of faith. We must not prejudge social and economic change *merely* because they are instituted by Marxist regimes. The spirit of President Kennedy's commencement address at American University in June, 1963 is more deeply Christian than many of the "anti-attitudes" which are cloaked in the garments of religion. Our nation, and particularly the Christian community which is much more free by nature than is government to experiment with varied efforts for understanding, needs to ponder carefully the President's words on that occasion. In part, he said,

Let us re-examine our attitude toward the Cold War, remembering that we are not engaged in a debate, seeking to pile up debating points. We are not here distributing blame or pointing the finger of judgment. We must deal with the world as it is, and not as it might have been had the history of the last eighteen years been different.

We must therefore persevere in the search for truth, in the hope that constructive changes within the Communist Bloc might bring within reach solutions which now seem beyond us. We must conduct our affairs in such a way that it becomes in Communists' interests to agree on a genuine peace. Above all, while defending our own vital interests, nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy—or of a collective death-wish for the world.

3. *Western churches must not allow themselves to be identified with the goals or the tangible expressions of Western international politics.* There is in this often a painful dilemma for the Christian who also loves his country and cherishes his national heritage. Yet the call to Christian discipleship is a stern summons to put all other loyalties secondary and to be able to speak with prophetic voice even when this proves to be judgment upon our other loyalties. The goals and possibilities open to the body politic must never set the limits within which the church may work nor determine her purposes. To fail to observe this distinction is to be guilty of what some of us in our worst moments suspect regarding the Eastern churches.

4. *We who compose the Western churches must first regain relevance to our own cultures.* All that has been said in this book heretofore bears upon this crucial requirement.

5. *The church must take the lead in identifying the great potential good in scientific and technological advances.* The long procrastination between the ancient condemnation of the material order as essentially evil and an acceptance of that order as one of the good gifts of God must be terminated. Ours is a time when even the mind and spirit can be enriched by a dedicated utilization of scientific and technological knowledge. In vast areas of the world people can be released from poverty and disease through technology. An adequate theology must make a place for scientific and technological values.

6. *The church everywhere in the world must cease being a party to the exploitation of races, religions, or individual members of minority groups.* Instead, the church must become the champion of the down-trodden and the exploited. It was our Lord who told us that what we have or have not done to the last and the least we have or have not done unto him. For too many years now the church has been at best a follower in the effort of the human spirit to gain the freedom which is its natural ele-

ment; at worst, the church has been among the exploiters. It is intolerable that we should longer permit the Marxists to pose as the liberators of the down-trodden while the church seeks to protect the status quo in which it may be far too comfortable.

7. *The church must develop an apologetic for the faith which speaks effectively to the contemporary mind.* Like it or not, this is a time in which trained minds are on the increase, and trained minds insist on evidence in support of either a scientific theory or a claim on religious devotion. Of course the faith must be proclaimed; but it will not do to hold that mere proclamation, especially in figures and language belonging to another century, will often be adequate to command the devotion of trained persons. There is too much evidence to the contrary.

The Christian faith is not a figment of credulous minds. It rests upon convictions concerning man and society, concerning human history, concerning the nature and significance of this world and the cosmos, concerning God and his creative love. These convictions have deservedly commanded the respect of some of the greatest minds across twenty centuries, and they carry profound implications for the mid-twentieth century. This faith must not be cheapened by question-begging nor by retreat from honest debate. Rather, it must be stated in figures familiar to the twentieth century and its relevance to contemporary life clarified.

8. *The Christian community must demonstrate the existential value of the faith.* Apologetic is essential in the present scene, but will be quickly discounted unless persons are significantly different and persistent problems are somehow better dealt with because the faith is taken seriously. This does not mean that Christians must be wiser, more clever, or more efficient than other men. They will not always need even to be stronger or better. What they will need is a capacity for love, for suffering, for faithfulness and for joy in living. They will need to demonstrate their faith in God, seek his guidance, accept his

judgment, and try ever again to go forward in his forgiveness. So far as what this means in practise; this is what this entire book has sought to discuss.

9. *The church must be indeed the reconciling community, taking initiative in bringing persons everywhere together to talk to one another about what matters and to work together.* The church must utterly fail in contemporary responsibility if it allows itself to become a refuge to which the "good" and "safe" and "devout" flee to protect one another from the clash of ideas and the demands of the world's work. Official government bodies must accept the limitations imposed by law and political prudence. Commercial agencies must first fulfil their own nature and serve the best interests of the economy. Among the channels through which intercultural contact can be established, only the church has both the right and the obligation to create a context in which mutual acceptance and complete honesty prevail, and in which genuine understanding can be sought. We have said already that the church cannot do this without investing itself, without losing its life as it now is. But when the church acts in a spirit of reconciliation, the love and wisdom of God becomes the most telling force in determining the result.

Throughout this book the focus has been upon the church as a *community* facing the necessity to regain relevance to the realities of life. The Christian as an individual always must be understood as a part of the Christian community. Yet within the Christian understanding of man and community, ultimate value and ultimate responsibility are both individual. In the dialectic in which Christianity must confront communism the impact of person upon person will be of immeasurable and crucial importance. What may be expected to occur when the Christian person confronts the Communist person, especially when this confrontation is at the level of genuine conviction and concern?

If the Christian is indeed a different person because of

what the love of God is doing in his life, it follows that he must bring to this personal relationship a strength, a faith in life and death, a peace that transcends the fortune of circumstances, and a freedom to be himself that no secularist—Communist or other—can match. There are competent observers who report that the spiritual poverty of dialectical materialism already is making an impact upon those who live under its sway. Charles C. West, for instance, holds that in an approach to the Communist as a human being experiencing problems which grow out of communism itself there is greatest hope of genuine communication. He writes:

[Regarding] the personal encounter between the Christian as a man and the Communist as a man: This is not usually the direct encounter which the Christian may have with the adherent of almost any other faith which is not his own . . . It is falsified by the hardened ideological casing through which the Communist encounters all reality, and by the hardened ideological casing which he may in all sincerity attribute to us. It is distorted by his purposes with relation to us and by the resistance we must offer to them. It is made more difficult by the responsibility we have to use our power to protect our neighbor against him, and maintain social health in spite of him. But the Communist himself has personal problems . . . most Communists face the problem of violating personal trust, and sacrificing people whom they know for the sake of their broader allegiance to the socialist society and Party discipline. The vision of the *Pieta* which so tortured Rubashov in Koester's *DARKNESS AT NOON*, casting doubt on his whole conviction that the goal was worth this discipline, is an ever-repeated experience. Related to this is the problem of truth and falsehood in an ideological atmosphere, and the issue of personal sincerity. Related too is the whole question of faith in the Soviet system as a whole and its destiny *versus* the cynicism and corruption which sets in as a reaction to the realities of Communist life. Encounter with the Communist as a person involves finding ways to break through his strategy toward us, his ideological blindness about us and the world, and his fear of facing himself—except in the image of a Party adherent—to the human



being beneath, whose problems are not so different from what ours would be in his condition.<sup>9</sup>

To whatever extent Mr. West is correct in this view (and I believe he is quite correct) Christians must face seriously before God the question of what we as persons have to contribute to the witness of the faith in a Communist order.

## VI

### A Final Word

We come at last to a final word—for this chapter, and for the book: Our topic has been the problem of the contemporary relevance of the church and our obligations as twentieth century churchmen. We have tried to be honest, and if sometimes there has seemed serious doubt that the church either could or would achieve genuine relevance, this doubt is justified by the facts. Despite genuine doubt, however, I have cast, and I continue to cast my lot with the church. Ever and again God has shown himself able to work through the community of faith and use that community in the fulfilment of his purpose in ways the community itself often did not wholly comprehend. I wager it will be so in our time also.

At the same time it is very important to be aware of the fact that God's ways are not always ours—that they are often past our finding out. As often as not he has worked outside the official religious bodies, even outside the entire company of the faithful. For all we know, the major workings of God's spirit in twentieth century America may be within some of the political or commercial or educational enterprises that operate quite apart from the organized church. And, who knows, God's plan for the U.S.S.R. may unfold through the birth and life of

9. Charles C. West, *COMMUNISM AND THE THEOLOGICALS*, 381-382. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958.

a child whose parents are members of the Young Communist League. What all God may be up to we cannot possibly know. We can only seek his will for us, never professing to know it clearly or to do it perfectly. But to know his will as we can and to seek honestly, however imperfectly, to live in relevance to his will and our time is, I am persuaded, his calling to us.

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